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To the Graduate Council:

I am submitting herewith a dissertation written by Susan Renee Wagner entitled "After the Final Bell: The Self-Directed Learning Practices of Elementary Teachers." I have examined the final electronic copy of this dissertation for form and content and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, with a major in Education.

Colleen Gilrane, Major Professor

We have read this dissertation and recommend its acceptance:

Richard Allington, Ralph Brockett, Stergios Botzakis

Accepted for the Council:
Carolyn R. Hodges

Vice Provost and Dean of the Graduate School

(Original signatures are on file with official student records.)

# After the Final Bell: The Self-Directed Learning Practices Of Elementary Teachers

A Dissertation

Presented for the

Doctor of Philosophy

Degree

The University of Tennessee at Knoxville

Susan Reneé Wagner

December 2011

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The road I traveled to complete this dissertation has been filled with many people who traveled with me. I am very grateful for their support and guidance along the way. First of all, I wish to acknowledge my doctoral committee. My chair, Colleen Gilrane, I want to thank for her expert advice, kindness, and motivation during my many years journey and for her guidance in conducting my research. Dick Allington, I want to thank for validating my classroom experiences as a teacher and researcher and reiterating the importance of literacy in the classroom. Ralph Brockett, I wish to thank for introducing me to the field of self-directed learning and in turn, my impetus for this research project. Stergios Botzakis, I want to thank for opening the path for learning through social media and keeping me involved in the discourse of educational policy and research.

Most importantly, I would like to thank my family. My husband, Terry, has been my utmost supporter along with my sons, Luke and Nolan. They have stepped up at home in many ways because I have attended classes or worked on papers. I have worked toward this goal with them always in the back of my mind.

Finally, I wish to thank my participants whose stories have validated the learning experiences of teachers seeking the best practices to enable students to learn.

ABSTRACT

Are elementary teachers self-directed learners? If so, do their learning activities outside their classrooms translate into their classrooms? The purpose of this study was to examine the relationship, if any, between elementary teachers' self-directed learning and activities in their classrooms. A two phase, mixed methods design first utilized a quantitative study from which the results were used to denote the type of data collected in the second, qualitative phase. The quantitative Phase I of this study involved using a survey instrument in order to identify self-directed learners and identify categories of teacher learners. These quantitative data were gathered through the use of the Self-Directed Learning Readiness Scale [SDLRS/LPA] (1977) which was administered online to 100 teacher respondents. The responses to the instruments were also analyzed statistically in order to generate descriptive statistics for this population of teachers. For the teachers in this study [N=100], the mean was 240.89 with a standard deviation of 2.019. The range was 91 and the variance was 407.735. This score fell within the "above average" range which indicated the teachers had developed an above average readiness for self-directed learning and determination of their own learning needs and goals and the ability to plan and carry out their own learning (Guglielmino, 2011). In Phase II, nine teachers scoring "high" and "above average" were interviewed. Results from the interviews revealed that teachers participate in self-directed learning activities which expressed their creative and professional selves. When the teachers in this study found that professional development did not meet the immediate needs of their classroom, they

planned and sought additional knowledge on their own. It was found that teacher self-directed learning actually included characteristics that research has found to be essential for successfully implemented professional development that results in improved student achievement. Implications of the study for practice and further research were also discussed.

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# Chapter 1: Introduction to the Problem

How do teachers do it all? Elementary teachers wear many hats: teacher, planner, accountant, trip coordinator, manager, along with being expert in many subject and content areas. Any visit to an elementary classroom would find the teacher not only teaching a whole group, guiding small groups, or providing one-on-one instructional support, but also doing countless other tasks as well. My own expectations of teaching were quickly dispelled amongst the daily mounds of paperwork, forms, and accounting that I had to do - often before the morning bell rang. There were absentee forms to turn in, money to count, yearbook orders to check off and turn in, in addition to field trips to plan, coordinate and collect money for. I also had to serve on committees and attend meetings on topics that did not directly affect my students' learning. Among all these unexpected peripheral activities, I still had to find time for planning my instruction and teaching my students.

Teachers act as role models for their students and facilitate the means in which student learning takes place. Teachers are constantly on the move, from student to student, from group to group, from meeting to meeting. All this ongoing activity occurs in order to successfully teach a curriculum that may encompass all content areas: reading, language arts, mathematics; geography, history, and science. When I entered the door to my first classroom, little did I realize that my learning had just begun. Subsequent years spent in evening classes pursuing graduate degrees while at the same time spending additional evenings grading papers, researching lesson ideas, and learning new

curriculum competed for valuable family personal time. I was still left with much to learn and know about this profession. While I may be writing an article review for a graduate class, I may also be designing a lesson utilizing GPS technology for finding latitude and longitude in the classroom.

With multitasking being a job prerequisite, I had little room for prescribed professional development without application for my classroom. I would balk at two-day seminars where I felt chained to my seat for hours on end, listening to presenters reading PowerPoint slides. Then, when back in the classroom, my frustration would mount when that two-days' worth of training did not match my grade level, subject area, or my required grade-level standards. Teachers who seek to offer the best instruction for their students must often look outside their district/school's professional development offerings in order to gain professional knowledge, stay current in their content areas, and develop better teaching methodologies in order to better facilitate student learning (Hill, 2009).

In my own practice as a teacher, I found I was linking my own personal learning pursuits to lessons within my classroom. The literature that I read in my own time was more often than not, children's literature. In turn I read and previewed my favorite books to my students who were more often than not inspired to check out the books that I had read and discussed with them.

When I learned to crochet, my class learned along with me. We crocheted scarves and bands creating arrays and rows and columns of colorful yarns all the while

incorporating state standards into the lessons. Student-created crafts were sold to help sponsor a grade-level trip to the Smoky Mountains Institute at Tremont.

When I stumbled upon geocaching after clicking a top ten search on the Yahoo news page, I discovered an outdoor treasure hunting game which used a GPSr to locate hidden "caches." I found this could easily translate into a lesson on latitude and longitude, map- reading skills, and get my students out of the classroom in an engaging geocache hunt.

Finally, my interest in learning how to play a mountain dulcimer through a series of YouTube video lessons sparked collaboration with our school's music teacher. This led not only led to her purchasing a mountain dulcimer, but also a grant in which we purchased a classroom set of mountain dulcimers. This single outside pursuit of mine led to history lessons on Appalachian culture and on American folk music which culminated in my students' performance during our school's annual Heritage Day's two-day festival.

I often wondered how many teachers brought their outside interests into the classroom, matched them with state standards and created lessons for their students. I saw my colleagues who were athletes outside the classroom combine movement in lessons, designing games to body map concepts or using exercise balls in the classroom after researching their use as seats on the internet. I know of one teacher whose weekend hiking trips in the Smokies led to a grade-level field trip and a lab on dissecting owl pellets.

These lessons that I mention above were not part of a classroom textbook. They were not offered as a district wide training. These lessons rose out of teachers own

interests and pursuits. When I learned about the area of self-directed learning as part of my adult learning class, I found an explanation for all the times that I brought my own learning into my classroom and the times when my colleagues had as well. I found myself wondering if teachers in general were more self-directed in their learning than others, and if they translated that learning into lessons for their students as well.

*Statement of the Problem*

Teachers who invest time and resources in directing their own learning may transfer that enthusiasm for learning and knowledge to their students in the classroom. For this dissertation, my goal is to focus the lens on the connection between the teacher as the self-directed learner and the teacher in the traditional mode of public education. I posit that self-directed learning can be further explored as an opportunity for professional growth for teachers which can result in a more personalized learning experience that will also benefit student learning in the classroom. While research into teacher professional development examines mandated or assigned teacher professional development programs, teacher professional development research has not fully examined the individual investigations and learning that teachers pursue in order to perfect their craft. Teachers are performing their own learning outside the typical staff development seminar or school-wide in-service. Whether to advance their knowledge, to prepare for a new content area or grade level, or to investigate new technologies to utilize in the classroom, many teachers are constantly learning and adding to their professional knowledge base on their

own - outside their mandated district and state professional development hours. It is this area of teacher self-directed learning that is lacking in the research literature.

Teacher professional development research has examined prescribed teacher professional development programs, yet what is not contained in the research are studies examining how individual teachers gather skills and knowledge on their own in order to perfect their expertise in the classroom (Mushayikwa & Lubben, 2009).

*Purpose of the Study*

The purpose of this study is to determine the relationships, if any, between self-directed learning readiness and elementary teaching. That is, do teachers identified as self-directed exhibit characteristics of self-directed learners, and if so, how do these characteristics and learning translate into their classroom instruction? I seek to identify and explore the self-directed learning activities of elementary teachers who direct their learning in order to obtain knowledge and skill sets which improve their lives and help them reach personal or professional goals. Through self-directed learning, teachers can further their teaching craft; pursue an interest which may impact classroom content; or learn for the sake of learning.

*Research Questions*

For this paper, my research questions are:

1. How do elementary teachers rate on the Self-Directed Learning Readiness Scale [SDLRS/LPA] (Guglielmino, 1977).

2. Do elementary teachers participate in self-directed learning activities?
3. What sorts of learning activities do teachers participate in outside of the school environment?
4. Do these learning activities translate into the classroom?

*Need for the Study*

Elementary teachers bring much to the classroom beyond the a scripted textbook lessons or end-of-chapter assignments (McCall, 2006). More often than not, those teachers identified as "exemplary" bring pieces of their lives into the classroom (Allington & Johnston, 2001; Haberman, 1995). Whether this means sharing their own collection of rocks with students, or guiding students through a genealogical study of the families within their communities, exemplary teachers create learning environments for their students which are motivating, challenging, and enlightening. These teachers go beyond the textbooks - they provide an "extra" dimension to their instruction which sets them apart.

By identifying these qualities, and perhaps by linking the self-directed learning of teachers to their teaching, a model of self-directed professional development can be shared which will assist preservice teachers, and current teachers to improve their practice. If teachers invest in their own learning needs and interests and link those with the needs of their students and school in order to facilitate learning, knowing how they do this may open a door for future professional growth that lies outside traditional professional development.

*Definition of Terms for the Project*

Self-Directed Learning: takes place among all types of people from many backgrounds outside the tradition, formal classroom. As defined by Malcolm Knowles (1975), self-directed learning is a:

> "process in which individuals take the initiative, with or without the help of others, in diagnosing their learning needs, formulating learning goals, identifying human and materials resources for learning, choosing and implementing appropriate learning strategies, and evaluating learning outcomes" (p. 18).

Self-Directed Learning Readiness Scale/Learning Preference Assessment [SDLRS/LPA]: Developed by Guglielmino (1977), it is a 58 item instrument which has a 5 point scale that is used in evaluating an individual's perceptions along 8 factors which have been linked to self-directedness.

*Chapter Summary*

In this chapter, I have discussed the context and the need for examining the self-directed learning practices of elementary teachers. I detailed the problem, the four research questions for my investigation and the definitions I will be using in this study. The following chapter contains my literature review of the theoretical framework for this study, background of teachers and professional development, a literature of self-directed learning including self-directed learning models, research on self-directed learning in

teachers, the Self-Directed Learning Readiness Scale/Learning Processes Assessment (SDLRS/LPA) and its validity in research.

# Chapter 2: Literature Review

## *Introduction*

This chapter contains the theoretical rationale for this study along with a literature review of self-directed learning. Merriman (2009) suggested that researchers find the majority of their research topics within their field of work and personal interest. In order to examine self-directed learning in exemplary teachers, I have assumed a constructivist theoretical framework which acknowledges self-directed learning as a way of acquiring knowledge outside the formal classroom situation. As an educator, I am interested in examining the position of teacher as learner and how self-directed learners go about constructing knowledge for personal growth and use in the classroom. Admittedly, I have been self-directed in my own professional development, seeking to learn methods outside of the professional development offerings of my school district. It is the incongruence with professional development offerings and my actual educational needs as a teacher that has led me to investigate self-directed learning of elementary teachers.

## *Theoretical Framework*

Olson (2003) reiterates that theorists and researchers situated within the constructivist paradigm believe that knowledge is built upon experiences of the learner. As an educator situated within the constructivist paradigm, I believe that learners construct knowledge based upon their individual experiences with their world and their day-to-day lives. Guba and Lincoln (2005), in an updated version of their categorized

research paradigms contended that within the ontology of constructivism, reality is relative, dependent upon the immediate and specifically constructed realities. Hatch (2002) expounded upon constructivist ontology: “constructive science argues that multiple realities exist that are inherently unique because they are constructed by individuals who experience the world from their own vantage points” (p. 15).

As a teacher, I am responding to the needs of students in my room, to my administration, and to my curriculum. Depending on the make-up of my students, I design lessons and instruction to fit their needs. Additionally, I seek information and training that will help me pursue my craft. Through my ongoing experiences as a teacher, I continuously build and renew upon my knowledge of educational methods and knowledge. Hatch (2002) stated that within the constructivist epistemology, researchers and participants are partners and that because of this relationship, total objectivity on the part of the researcher as in positivistic and postpositivistic paradigms is not realistically obtainable.

In contrast to those paradigms which hold that only one finite reality exists, constructivism holds that there are many interpretations of reality or knowledge and that the researcher does not discover  or uncover this finite knowledge but “constructs” it, building upon the multiple perspectives of the researcher and participants (Merriam, 2009). Classroom educators see this everyday as each student shares his or own perspective within the classroom setting. In turn, educators constructing their own knowledge must build upon foundations from methods classes, professional development, and their everyday experiences.

The epistemology of the constructivist paradigm allows for such "co-created findings" as knowledge is subjective and the constructivist framework recognizes that knowledge is accumulated through "more sophisticated reconstructions" and "vicarious experience" (Guba & Lincoln, 2005). Hatch (2002) further explained that researchers and research participants work in partnership to coconstruct knowledge and that as such, researchers cannot be resigned to objective observers as with the positive and postpositivistic paradigms. This corroborates Merriman (2009) wrote that "the researcher is the primary instrument for data collection and analysis" (p. 15).

*Teachers and Professional Development*

Grootenboer (1999) was critical of educational research into the current practices of teacher professional development in that the research itself has been immaterial to teachers and disconnected from their daily classroom interactions and offers little influence on their teaching. Teachers are busy practitioners with a workload that does not end with the last ring of the school bell. They must evaluate any professional development they attend and weigh its importance as to its relevance to their daily practice.

As part of Goals 2000 (1993), the U.S. Department of Education stated that for teachers to steer students toward meeting the more rigorous standards set in place by the 2002 No Child Left Behind [NCLB] legislation, professional development would serve as the "bridge" that connects teachers at their present location in experience and knowledge to where they need to go in order to raise the achievement of their students. The U.S.

Department of Education espoused this mission statement for professional development: "The mission of professional development is to prepare and support educators to help all students achieve to high standards of learning and development" (pg. 2) and included 10 principles:

1. focusing on teachers as being key to student learning, but also including the entire school community;
2. focusing on "individual, collegial, and organizational improvement";
3. respects and nourishes the intellectual and leadership capacity of teachers and principals - all who are involved in the school community;
4. shows the best practices and research;
5. enables teachers to increase their knowledge and expertise in their content areas, in strategies and technologies;
6. promotes ongoing inquiry and improvement;
7. incorporates collaborative planning by the participants and the facilitators;
8. time and resources are substantial;
9. is guided by an overall long-term plan; and finally,
10. professional development is evaluated in a regular and timely fashion in order to judge the impact on its effectiveness on teachers and students learning (H.R. 1804--103rd Congress: Goals 2000: Educate America Act., pg. 2).

Likewise, the North Central Regional Educational Laboratory (2009) posted a framework of research-based teacher professional development on its website. These

phases of teacher professional development should be ongoing, overlap, and repeat and serve as guidelines for administration and teachers in selecting, conducting, and pursuing ongoing education. The phases included:

- Building a knowledge base
- Observing models and examples
- Reflecting on practice
- Changing practice
- Gaining and sharing expertise (pg. 1)

Despite these guidelines and recommendations, teacher professional development doesn't always attain such lofty goals or practical ones for that matter, and professional development as currently practiced has its fair share of critics. Hill (2009) asserted that in reality, the system that we call professional development is "broken" and called teacher development programs touting a "research proven" basis, such as school-based coaching and online content, as failing teachers and maintained that newer professional development trends like the Japanese lesson study method, weren't actually increasing time and commitment from teachers to professional development. Hill referred to many of these newer innovations in teacher professional development methods as "fads."

Despite the claims of professional development programs which tout glowing results based in scientific research, Hill found data that revealed most teachers "engage in only the minimum professional learning required by their state or district each year," (pg. 471). Despite all the research proven programs, teachers just weren't excited about

mandated professional development. Using data compiled from the National Center for Education Statistics, Hill reported that in a survey on teacher professional development, more than 50 percent of the teachers who answered only spent one day or less in professional development. Hill contended that the low turnout for professional development merely matched state minimal requirements for keeping teacher licensure up to date, which is on average 15 professional development days over a period up to five years. When there is lack of teacher choice in professional development opportunities coinciding with mandated professional development hours, one can see the lack of enthusiasm reflected in the turn-out figures. Offsite professional development requires a large effort on the part of the teacher in planning and commitment. Teachers must plan for travel, whether it be simply determining the directions for drive to a local meeting, or the more detailed planning required if an extended time away from home and classroom are required. Resources for expenses, child-care, food and necessities, while they may be reimbursed, are also considerations for teachers. Even when programs are brought in-house or in-district, teachers consider past experiences and can become jaded over new programs and discouraged over perceived lack of support once in the classroom.

Hargreaves and Dawe (1990) found a culture of contrived collegiality among teachers when interactions between teacher learning groups were controlled by administration. Teachers may be assigned to groups based upon their grade level or content area. Teachers may also be forced to study within a grade-level team which in the day-to-day operation of the school does not function as a team. While in the classroom, teachers can avoid teachers with whom they have had previous conflicts or differing

philosophies, yet when thrust together during professional development the contrived collegiality occurs. Due to these learning group dynamics, teachers may not fully participate and experience professional learning. When this occurs, it is in direct contrast to the desired goal of collaboration among teachers.

However, in another study, Grootenboer (1999) interviewed teachers who indicated that one of the benefits of their professional development experiences included gaining new ideas and meeting with other teachers who sought similar goals and ideas - a hopeful testimony to collaborative learning groups in these situations. One fact that these teachers did note was the lack of professional support they received once they returned to the classroom and were unable to apply their learning. Isolation in learning meant that they were sometimes the only teacher in the school building with the new learning, having only "bits and pieces" to utilize in their classroom (pg. 6). Teachers want to give their students the best education using the most effective educational methods and models and according to Grootenboer (1999), this was a substantially motivating factor for teachers to maintain and update their craft. Even when collaborative and supportive learning groups take place during professional development, isolation in the classroom remained a hurdle to implementing learning.

However, there is promise for teacher professional development. There have been some key findings about what is actually working in professional development (Darling-Hammond, Wei, Andree, Richardson, & Orphanos, 2009):

1. Sustained and intensive professional development is related to student achievement

2. Collaborative approaches to professional learning can promote school change that extends beyond individual classrooms
3. Effective professional development is intensive, ongoing, and connected to practice; focuses on the teaching and learning of specific academic content; is connected to other school initiatives; and builds strong working relationships among teachers

Gilrane, Roberts, and Russell (2008) evaluated the effectiveness of a professional development effort which was part of the Reading Excellence Act over a two-year period. After analyzing student achievement data along with intensive qualitative research collected from conducting observations of teachers, conducting semi structured interviews and focus-groups, taking school climate inventories, utilizing teacher questionnaires, and collecting teacher narratives the researchers found the following conditions supportive of teacher growth, change, and reflection:

1. Voice in determining professional development needs
2. Structures (materials, time, and collaborative planning space) in place to support teaching
3. Feeling supported by administrators and change facilitators in their efforts
4. Observing their student's success and having meetings to discuss assessment data that celebrated good news and emphasized areas for growth

*Self-Directed Learning*

While teachers work at connecting learning from traditional professional development courses and collaborations to the reality of their work in the classroom, other models of learning offer possibilities to enable them to do just that. One such model is self-directed learning. Self-directed learning offers teachers the opportunity to choose, plan, evaluate, and implement their own learning in the classroom and affords teachers control, something that standard teacher professional development has not.

Self-directed learning in and of itself is a way of life. People of all walks of life, ages, and careers participate in self-directed learning activities outside of the formal education classroom or training centers. According to Knowles (1975), self-directed learning is a:

> "process in which individuals take the initiative, with or without the help of others, in diagnosing their learning needs, formulating learning goals, identifying human and materials resources for learning, choosing and implementing appropriate learning strategies, and evaluating learning outcomes" (p. 18).

Merriman, Caffarella and Baumgarter (2007) readily acknowledge that adults learn by themselves at different stages of their lives and for different purposes. They organized research and theory into self-directed learning within three areas: self-directed learning as goals of the learner; the process of self-directed study; and the personal attributes of self-directed learners. Adults study on their own as a result of life changes, interests, or in order to become part of a community. They organize their learning and

seek out resources and people in order to help them, and they have characteristics which enable them to monitor their learning and complete their goals. Many teachers have probably been involved in self-directed learning projects throughout their careers.

Brockett and Hiemstra (1991) affirmed that learning takes place throughout life. Self-directed learning, in regards to teacher professional development, can afford teachers opportunities to expand their knowledge base without teachers suffering some of the negative consequences that can reportedly follow the traditional, one-size-fits-all teacher professional-development programs. What is difficult for teachers and administrators within the institution of education to overcome on the way to beginning the path toward self-directed learning is the traditional belief that a learner needs a teacher, or instructor, in order to receive knowledge.

*Models of Self-Directed Learning*

Grow (1991) proposed the Staged Self-Directed Learning Model which Merriam, Caffarella & Baumgartner (2007) categorized as an instructional self-directed learning model. In examining teachers and teaching, with its own set of entrenched idiosyncrasies peculiar to the profession, Grow's (1991) staged model advances learners through four learning stages: from that of being the dependent learner who needs coaching; to the interested student who is inspired by the motivating instructor; to the involved learner working as an equal with a facilitator; finally culminating with the self-directed learner relying at times on a consultant. This model focused on teachers assisting learners by meeting them at their stage and describes the characteristic of teachers at each level.

Teachers effectively assisting the learner through the self-directed learning process must assume the appropriate instructional role depending upon the stage of the learner. K-12 teachers realize that learners need an authority figure and serve in that role daily. Self-directed teachers will need to examine the model from the viewpoint of being the learner as well. This model detailed the stages in which teachers can gain control of their own learning and progress to becoming self-directed learners themselves.

Grow (1991) contended that "being a dependent learner is not a defect; it can however be a serious limitation" (pg. 129). Many teachers in a professional development setting are placed in the role of the dependent learner. This dependency results in teacher dissatisfaction with their learning and the outcome of their professional development. Grow stated that in the public or institutional arena, self-directed learning as illustrated in stage four is not possible - with learners being highly self-directed and the teacher serving as a consultant. However, this type of learning situation is more often the norm for teachers practicing their craft. It is not uncommon for teachers to hear or read about a certain methodology, investigate that methodology on their own, and begin to implement it within their own classrooms. This is the self-directed learning that teachers frequently do, but teachers are seldom credited for this self-designed professional development and often don't recognize it as professional development themselves.

What is common in the typical professional development setting is a learner/teacher mismatch. This mismatch often occurs between the teacher or deliverer's style and the learner's stage of self-direction (Grow, 1991). When a teacher is just released from a one- or two-day professional development seminar, he or she may still be

a dependent learner and still thoroughly dependent on a teacher or coach for direction. A mismatch between stages of learner self-direction and level of teacher instruction explains the teacher-as-learner's inability to apply new knowledge when he or she returns to the classroom. There, the teacher's only connection to the professional development instructor may be that email address or printout of the presentation slides. The teacher - still a dependent, stage one learner - is not ready to be autonomous.

In truly self-directed learning, the learner, rather than a school administrator, principal or seminar leader, takes upon themselves responsibility for their learning. Brockett and Hiemstra's (1991) PROmodel (Figure 2-1) defined self-direction along two dimensions:

**Figure 2. 1 The "Personal Responsibility Orientation" (PRO) Model.**
Adapted from Brocket R.G. & Hiemstra, R. (1991) *Self-direction in adult learning: Perspectives on theory, research and practice*. New York: Routledge. P. 25. Used with permission.

First, it defined self-directed learning as an instructional method which involves the learner actually taking on the role of planning and essentially undertaking the learning and evaluation of their learning along the way. This matches the unaccredited type of learning teachers create for themselves. Meanwhile, a second dimension is then oriented toward the learner's personality. Are they ready for learning? For a teacher/learner attending a professional development training involving a technique or methodology (dimension one) which did not match their own philosophy of learning, that teacher is less likely to take up that knowledge and apply it in the classroom (dimension two).

The PRO-model of self-direction permits one to view teacher professional development through four factors and allows for the learner's ability to respond to their situations. Some teachers accept new programs and instructional methodologies quite readily. They have the wherewithal to ask for support; send that email; and the ability to self-asses their own learning in order to know when they need to seek assistance. Yet, there are other teachers, who for various reasons, are not willing or able to support themselves and cannot make that commitment to be responsible for their own learning. From this standpoint Brockett and Hiemstra (1991) posited the importance of having balance between the "learner's level of self-direction and the extent to which opportunity for self-directed learning is possible…" (, pg. 30).

*Research on Self-directed learning in Teachers*

Wang, West & Bentley (1989) reported that thirteen different groups had been targeted in self-directed learning research. While there are studies examining self-directed learning of K-12 students and how teachers can best facilitate K-12 learners in becoming self-directed learners, little research into the self-directed learning of public school teachers exists, particularly at the elementary school level. Despite interest in self-directed learning across many aspects of adult education, a quantitative content analysis of adult education research revealed that over a time span from 1980-1999, merely one percent of research articles in majority adult education literature examined self-directed learning (Ralph. G. Brockett, et al., 2000).

Within the research body on self-directed learning, I found targeted areas of adult education ranging from secondary high school teachers (Beatty, 1999); exemplary elementary principals (Guglielmino & Hillard, 2007); teacher performance appraisals (Rowe, 2000); teachers working with students as self-directed learners (Bolhuis & Voeten, 2004; Eilon & Kliachko, 2004); corporate and seminar trainers (Johnson, 2006); rural adults (Terry, 2006); breast cancer patients (Rager, 2004); and graduate nursing students and faculty (Lunyk-Child, et al., 2001). Of the previously noted content analysis of adult education literature by Brockett, et. al. (2000), one third were published in the *Journal of Continuing Education in Nursing* and none pertained to self-directed learning of teachers. Rowe (2000) concurred that "there appears a scarcity of empirical evidence to link concepts of SDL and teacher professional growth" (p. 7).

Within the K-12 community, Guglielmino and Hillard (2007) examined the use of self-directed learning in ten exemplary elementary principals using the Self-Directed Learning Readiness Scale [SDLRS/LPA]. They wanted to know how principals compared on the SDLRS/LPA to other previously studied groups such as corporate executives. They found that the exemplary principals - those principals whose schools excelled in growing reading scores for their districts, pursued self-directed learning. These principals engaged in self-directed learning not only for themselves, but they also fostered it for their teachers. Guglielmino and Hillard also found that the exemplary principals built shared learning communities within their schools. The principals were able to create their own plans for learning and conducted their own research, and they did not wait for mandates or guidelines from the state. When Guglielmino and Hillard compared the principals' scores on the Self-Directed Learning Readiness Scale (Guglielmino, 1977) to other groups, they found that these principals had the highest scores ever recorded on the SDLRS/LPA instrument. In the accompanying interviews with the 10 principals studied, the researchers were able to identify themes which were shared across the participants: teacher empowerment; innovation; shared leadership; and reliance on data to lead their schools. The principals were found not only to be highly self-directed, but also to enable self-direction in their staff. Guglielmino and Hillard (2007) found these principals were modeling self-directed learning for their faculties.

The Brocket and Hiemstra (1991) PROmodel can focus attention on the personal responsibility these school leaders exhibited in their self-directed learning and in supporting their staff. An interesting area for research that these findings highlight would

be how school climate and environment fostered by highly self-directed principals enhanced any self-directed learning in their teachers.

Beatty (1999) combined self-directed learning with collegial and emotional support when researching a focus group of teachers in order to examine the idea that self-directed learners look to others and groups for additional learning support. While Guglielmino and Hillard (2007) found elementary principals modeling and fostering a climate of self-directed learning, Beatty (1999), in contrast, found that secondary teachers were isolated. Despite being leaders within their own classroom, they were afforded little interaction with adults their own age. Often, these interactions were at the discretion of administration or supervisors in charge of creating the teacher's schedules. The study found that teachers were more sensitive to being cut off from their creative flow than from salary and other working conditions. Support groups were able to overcome some of that isolation and encouraged self-directed learning among the secondary teachers.

Rowe (2000) examined the implementation of a teacher performance appraisal that encouraged teacher self-directed learning. Typically, teachers do not view an evaluation process as an opportunity for learning and growth. Rowe stipulated that a teacher appraisal process is all the more effective when it is directed by the teacher. Where teacher professional growth and development are concerned, the benefits of self-directed learning are not being utilized to their fullest. Self-directed learning would allow teachers a more positive learning experience. Rowe found that teachers' measures of efficacy influenced their attitudes in, and there subsequent success at, implementing an appraisal process based in self-directed learning. The teachers themselves came to

believe that the most effective appraisal and evaluations were self-directed. However, as with Beatty (1999), these findings also highlighted the barriers which hinder teacher and administrator relationships. Control was the primary issue for the teachers. Beatty found that extremes of internal or external loci of control could be mediated by participation in a study group where self-directed learning revealed powerful motivational effects for the teachers in the study.

Research (Beatty, 1999; Rowe, 2000) has shown that teacher professional growth is subject to teacher efficacy, self-directed learning, and many other individual factors. Greater levels of teacher efficacy and willingness to engage in self-directed learning would be indicators of success in a process of professional growth and development where teachers and administrators need to be partners in the process.

Grootenberger (1999) used teacher action research and collaborative group support in mathematics teachers' self-directed professional development. Participants reported a number of benefits in that the experience was collaborative and each had opportunities to reflect upon their teaching. Three issues were identified as important to their successful implementation of self-directed professional development: the role taken by school administrators as approving but not too intrusive; having time available to visit other teacher's classrooms without causing a disruption in other teachers' responsibilities while teachers left their classes; and finally the support of colleagues which was considered the most significant factor. This study highlighted the growth and learning that is possible within the collaborative support system of teacher collegial groups.

Despite its moniker, self-directed learning is not meant to describe a sole learner closeted alone at a desk in his or her home. "Self-directed learning is, ironically, highly collaborative," (Abdullah, 2001, pg. 2). Those undertaking self-directed learning projects seek out experts in order to further their own growth and learning. Teachers, new to certain methodologies or practices, seek out those who are experienced.

One area in which teachers are learning about self-directed learning is in enabling their own students to become more self-directed in their own learning. Bolhuis and Voeten (2004) explored teachers' conceptions of their students' learning and their own learning in Dutch high schools. The researchers administered a newly crafted Learning Inventory (Bolhuis & Voeten, 2004) to high school teachers in The Netherlands where change was underway to support newer models of student independent learning. They found that teachers expected greater tolerance for uncertainty in their own students than the teachers expected in themselves. These differing learning conceptions could lead to a teacher student mismatch with students who needed more guidance and structure from the teachers who in turn may think the students would learn well with independent, self-directed learning.

An example of teacher student mismatch can be seen through Eilon's and Kliachko's (2004) study which examined students' perceptions of their teacher's role in an internet-based science web course. The researchers found that students met with problems implementing the self-directed learning aspect of the on-line course and missed the traditional role and guidance of the teacher as well when learning on their own. These

findings seems to fit Grow's (1991) description of stage mismatch between teachers and students.

Bolhuis and Voeten (2004) suggested that teachers who identified as having low tolerance for uncertainty in learning in themselves and in their students could benefit from additional support and structure in their own learning and professional development. They also found that teachers believed they could continue learning and growing all throughout their teaching years, but their assumptions about their own students' learning weren't as broad and hopeful. Teachers' perceptions about student intelligence were that it was more stagnant and predetermined resulting in thinking which could limit teacher responsibility for student learning.

Transforming teachers' thinking and teaching methodologies from supporting their students' to supporting their own self-directed learning can be a difficult process. Cifuentes, Davis, & Clark (1996) studied such transformations in preservice teachers. Their findings revealed that preservice teachers do need more exposure to the work of the master teacher during their college courses in order to instill teaching methods other than lecture and to nurture self-directed learning of their own students.

Lunyk-Child, Crooks, Ellis, Ofosu, O'Mara, and Rideout (2001) undertook an examination into a nursing college's faculty and student perceptions of self-directed learning and the factors that make self-directed learning possible or obstruct self-directed learning. They found that faculty and student learners must forge a commitment to self-directed learning which has as its tenets the charge of empowering learners with the responsibility of their own decision making. In analyzing faculty interview transcripts,

they found that faculty were familiar with self-directed learning concepts, but were confused about their roles and about rating students. Students, in turn, considered the faculty to be sources of guidance, and wanted more support in the initial years of their program with clear statements of objectives. Students underwent a transformation which began with frustration, confusion, and dissatisfaction on the part of the learner. However, the learning process culminated with students emerging with greater confidence and increased knowledge and skills. Finally, faculty development was crucial to maintain high standards of competency in self-directed learning facilitation. While the researchers based this study on Taylor's (1986) self-directed learning model, one can see the possibility for teacher student mismatch at the college level. Grow's (1991) instructional self-directed learning model is also applicable here in viewing instructional mismatch.

We know that teacher professional development, like state-mandated standards for student learning, can be highly directed, yet personally unfulfilling for teachers, especially when they return to the classroom. Self-directed learning can prove to be a powerful and meaningful way for teachers to have control, choice, and growth in their own professional development. In order to become self-directed in their learning and in their professional development, teachers may have to overcome obstacles with administration. The over control of some administrators can be frustrating and taxing and afford no credibility to teacher self-directed learning. In contrast, some teachers may face a lack of collegial and administrative support for own beliefs about self-directed learning resulting in their own questioning of the validity of self-directed learning.

In order to make the most of this self-directed learning methodologies, teachers may need to overcome internal obstacles as well. While many adult learners can become self-directed in areas of interest, for teachers having taught in a traditional, teacher-directed learning establishment, the changing roles from that of bestowing or guiding knowledge to others to that of seeking knowledge can be difficult and frustrating. Teachers will need to transform their thinking about where knowledge comes from and who bestows that knowledge.

Self-directed learning does not mean that a teacher will take up a book, read it, learn it, and then do it. On the contrary, many complicated exchanges and social interactions occur before learning takes place and teachers will need to realize that the door to their classroom opens both ways. Seeking support from colleagues and building a community of shared knowledge builds support for their learning. Teachers need not be alone in their endeavors and must realize the necessity to seek guidance and mentoring when necessary.

Finally, I see that teacher self-directed learning is an area needing more research. Much of the current research looks at what is lacking in current programmed professional development for teachers or the relationship between teachers and administration and the instructional interplay between teachers and students. Teachers have been encouraged and perhaps have attended professional development seminars on how to encourage and foster self-directed learning in their student and within the classroom. However, one area of research that should be investigated is how teachers are self-directed in their own learning and what benefits do their students see from their teachers being self directed. Are

exemplary teachers self-directed? Also, the effects of highly self-directed principals on the self-directed learning of their teaching staff would be an avenue of research as well. Self-directed learning in elementary teaching is area of promise for both teachers and researchers.

*Self-Directed Learning Readiness Scale*

In this study, I looked for a means to identify teachers who were highly self-directed in their learning. The Self-Directed Learning Readiness Scale [SDLRS]was developed in 1977 by Lucy Guglielmino as a measurement of many complex skills, attitudes, and characteristics which determine an individual's ability to monitor their own personal learning (Guglielmino, 1977). Since its development, the SDLRS (also known as the Learning Preference Assessment [LPA] to eliminate response bias from those taking the instrument) has been used by over 500 organizations around the world and has been included in over 90 doctoral dissertations (Guglielmino, 1977).

Consisting of 58 likert-type questions, the SDLRS/LPA is provided in two formats for adult and children respectively. Adult respondents read positive and/or negative statements descriptive of learning practices and indicate the degree that each statement is characteristic of their own beliefs, attitudes, skills or actions. The research version of the instrument for larger organizations or institutions is scored by the developers, Guglielmino and Associates. Conversely, a self-scored version is available for individuals.

*SDLRS/LPA Validity*

In developing the SDLRS/LPA, Guglielmino (1977, 2011) used a three-round Delphi survey of 14 self-directed learning authorities who were entailed with listing and rating qualities which would be inherent in and descriptive of a self-directed learner. Those characteristics which obtained a median rating of desirable, necessary, or essential in self-directed learning were used in the design of individual items for the SDLRS/LPA. The instrument was then given to 307 subjects in Georgia, Virginia, and Canada for item analysis and to select any items for revision. A reliability of .87 was estimated for the SDLRS/LPA which was later expanded to the 58 - item instrument (Guglielmino, 2011).

*Criticism of SDLRS/LPA*

Since its introduction in 1977, the SDLRS /LPA has been scrutinized in the literature on self-directed learning. Long and Agyekum (1983, 1984) sought to validate the SDLRS/LPA by testing faculty and their students. Faculty at two colleges rated each student in the study along the same characteristics Guglielmino identified in her original study on the SDLRS/LPA. The authors posited that the characteristics identified by Guglielmino's SDLR could also be identified by college faculty in those students they closely observe. Faculty members were asked to identify their students who they deemed as self-directed in their learning. Conversely, these students completed various instruments along with the SDLRS/LPA such as the Agreement Response Scale and Rokeach's Dogmatism Scale. Despite an initial absence of an association between faculty

ratings and students' performance and after a follow-up (Long & Agyekum, 1984), Long and Agyekum deemed their findings supportive of SDLRS/LPA.

Brockett (1985) has also been cited in the literature for questioning the reliability of the SDLRS/LPA. Brockett considered the appropriateness of the instrument's use across different populations - specifically those with lower levels of educational attainment. He found a level of difficulty in completing the instrument for respondents with limited educational attainment. Noting Long and Agyekum's (1983) call for validation of the SDLRS/LPA based upon intensive experimenter observation, Brockett reflected upon his experience in oral readings of SDLRS/LPA items to elderly participants. Of his sample, 62.5% completed the instrument by having the experimenter read the inventory items to them, enabling investigator to observe specific items where difficulties occurred. Brockett observed that Likert designed items, which included reverse scoring and items written in double negatives were problematic. Also frustrating to respondents was the wording between the Likert five responses they were to select as their answer. Because of his observations, Brockett cautioned against problems administering the instrument to adults with low formal educational attainment and concluded that other types of learning should be included in the wording of items used to assess self-directed learning readiness.

Brookfield (1985) in fact criticized the field of self-directed learning for heavily focusing research on middle class adults and offered criticism to the likelihood that working-class adults with poor "educational attainments" (pg. 64) would regard survey

instruments like the SDLRS/LPA with suspicion. He also interjected that extensive usage of instruments would detract from the actual quality of learning that takes place.

Field (1989) investigated the SDLRS and called into question its structure, validity and reliability and questioned its widespread usage in research and conclusions based upon the instrument's categorization of populations as having characteristics of self-directedness. He claimed problems with the wording and structure of the scale itself and questioned the original methodology behind its development and put forth that rather than measuring an eight factor structure, instead the scale measures a homogeneous construct that suggests love or enthusiasm for learning and not self-directed learning. Therefore, research using the scale which identifies populations or persons as self-directed in their learning, would, in essence be flawed. Field then called for the disuse of the instrument in research. Guglielmino (1989) contended that Field's article contained many inaccuracies which led him to inaccurate conclusions. She also called into question his interpretation of key terms of the original study and his reanalysis of inventory items and supported her original research. Her conclusions were supported by Long (1989) and McCune (1989) who also examined Field's article and concluded that little contribution was made by it and that his analysis was flawed.

Delahaye and Smith (1995) used a correlation analysis with the Student's Orientation Questionnaire (SOQ) and found that the SDLRS/LPA had acceptable construct validity - but they recommended usage of the SDLRS/LPA only for respondents over 20 years of age. They noted that the SDLRS/LPA can be administered to children

but with them the validity and reliability are not as stable. However, they acknowledged that a vast number of studies supported the SDLRS/LPA.

Despite these concerns, a diverse body of research exists which has utilized the SDLRS to examine self-directed learning readiness and other variables and subjects. Some examples include: life satisfaction (Ralph. G. Brockett, 1985), medical students (Frisby, 1991), cross-cultural adaptability (Chuprina, 2001), resilience (Robinson, 2003), satisfaction in on-line higher educational courses (Fogerson, 2005), experiential learning environments (Jiusto & DiBiasio, 2005), achievement in face-to-face and two-way distance learning (Hsu & Shiue, 2006), and health promotion in the elderly (Hulsman, 2011). The SDLRS has been translated into 22 different languages and used in hundreds of studies and many theses and dissertations since its development in 1977 (Guglielmino, 2011) and is cited in adult education texts for is wide usage as a valid instrument (Ralph. G. Brockett & Hiemstra, 1991; Merriam, et al., 2007). My study focused on elementary teachers who have at least a bachelor's degree in order to obtain licensure to teach and should not have problems with the language or readability of it. Therefore, I chose to use this instrument in order to select teachers who are highly self-directed in learning for interviews.

*Summary of Chapter*

In this chapter, the theoretical foundation for this study comes out of constructivist foundations which posit that knowledge is built upon the experiences of the learner. Teacher professional development, though required, is often found lacking by the very

teachers required to take it. Self-directed learning poses several models, two of which can apply to this research: the PROmodel (Ralph. G. Brockett & Hiemstra, 1991) for addressing teachers as self-directed learners and the GROW model (Grow, 1991) teachers as instructors of self-directed learning. Research is lacking in the area of self-directed learning of elementary teachers within the realm of adult education. However, themes found in the existing literature reveal that self-directed learning is a life-long process and surprisingly collaborative. The main instrument for identifying characteristics of self-directed learning, the SDLRS/LPA, has been used for decades despite a few criticisms.

# Chapter 3: Methodology

Merriam (2009) writes:

> In its broadest sense, research is a systematic process by which we know more about something than we did before engaging in the process. We can engage in this process to contribute to the knowledge base in a field (pure research), improve the practice of a particular discipline (applied research), assess the value of something (evaluation research), or address a particular, localized problem (action research). (p. 4)

## *Introduction*

The questions proposed for this study examine the relationship, if any, between elementary teachers' self-directed learning and activities in their classrooms. This chapter will describe the methods used in conducting this study including sample selection, survey instrument, data collection, interviewing, and data analysis.

## *Mixed Methods Design*

My purpose in conducting this study based upon my theoretical framework leads me to choose a mixed methods design for my research project. Huck (2008) defined mixed method studies as those studies where the researcher includes both a quantitative and qualitative element to the research design. Merriam stated that selecting a project design flows from the research question (2009). My questions, "How do elementary

teachers rate on the Self-Directed Learning Readiness Scale [SDLRS/LPA]? (Guglielmino, 1977)"; "Do elementary teachers participate in self-directed learning activities?"; "What sorts of learning activities do teachers participate in inside and outside of the school environment?"; and "Do these learning activities translate into the classroom?" show my intent to build on the knowledge base of self-directed learning research by investigating a previously unstudied group of learners.

While a mixed methods approach may seem incongruous to a constructivist framework, I would argue that this design fits well within the constructivist paradigm chosen for this study. Huck (2008) stated that in recent years educational researchers have begun using both quantitative and qualitative research designs and that support for a multimodal approach requires competency in both quantitative and qualitative methodologies. It was in this vein that I hoped to build upon existing knowledge in areas of pure research in the educational field through a quantitative component and to applied research through the qualitative portion in order to improve the practice of teaching and learning. I proposed using a variation of a Quan-Qual model design as described by Huck (2008). This mixed methods design first utilized a quantitative study from which the results were used to denote the type of data collected in the second, qualitative phase.

*The SDLRS/LPA - Instrument*

The quantitative aspect of my study involved using a survey instrument in order to identify self-directed learners and identify categories of teacher learners. These quantitative data were gathered through the use of the Self-Directed Learning Readiness

Scale [SDLRS/LPA] (Guglielmino, 1977) which was administered online to 100 teacher respondents. The responses to the instruments were also analyzed statistically in order to generate descriptive statistics for this population of teachers. In this study, teachers who responded to the online survey instrument in the quantitative Phase I are referred to as "respondents." Teachers respondents who chose to participate in the interviews during the qualitative Phase II are referred to as "participants."

*Quantitative Respondents*

Every school district in a southeastern state was sent an email describing the study and containing a link to the online survey. District contacts were asked to forward the email to elementary teachers in the district if participation in the study was permitted. The 100 teachers who responded to the SDLRS/LPA survey were volunteers who received the email and chose to follow the link and take the survey. Demographic data describing these teachers follow.

**Table 3. 1 Race**

| | Race | Frequency | Percent |
|---|---|---|---|
| Valid | African American | 1 | 1.0 |
| | Caucasian | 95 | 95.0 |
| | Biracial | 1 | 1.0 |
| | Other | 2 | 2.0 |
| | Total | 99 | 99.0 |
| Missing | No Answer | 1 | 1.0 |
| Total | | 100 | 100.0 |

As shown in Table 3.1, ninety-five percent of the survey respondents identified themselves as Caucasian in race with one African American respondent, one biracial, and two respondents selecting "other." One respondent did not answer this question on the survey.

**Table 3. 2 Grade Teaching**

| | | Frequency | Percent |
|---|---|---|---|
| Valid | Kindergarten | 12 | 12.0 |
| | First | 14 | 14.0 |
| | Second | 12 | 12.0 |
| | Third | 6 | 6.0 |
| | Fourth | 7 | 7.0 |
| | Fifth | 8 | 8.0 |
| | Specialist: | 20 | 20.0 |
| | Other: | 21 | 21.0 |
| | Total | 100 | 100.0 |

In examining the grades these teachers taught we can see in Table 3.2 that the largest responses came from the primary grades with fourteen first grade teachers completing the online survey, twelve Kindergarten teachers, and twelve second grade teachers who responded as well. There were six third grade teachers who responded, seven fourth grade teachers who responded and eight fifth grade teachers who responded.

Interestingly, forty-one teachers identified themselves as "specialists" or "other." Both categories had the option to further identify their position by typing information in an additional comment field. Twenty respondents selected the "Specialist" category and

twenty-one chose “other.” Responses typed in online for the “Specialist” category are detailed in Table 3.3. Included are three special education and/or resource teachers; six reading and Title 1 teachers; one reading and gifted teacher; three art teachers and three music teachers (including one teacher who was both art and music); two physical education teachers; three guidance counselors, one school psychologist; one literacy coach and one ESL teacher.

**Table 3. 3 Grade Teaching-Specialist**

| | | Frequency | Percent |
|---|---|---|---|
| Valid | | 79 | 79.0 |
| | 1-2 | 1 | 1.0 |
| | 1st but now Pre-K Director | 1 | 1.0 |
| | 6th | 2 | 2.0 |
| | counseling | 1 | 1.0 |
| | extracurricular | 1 | 1.0 |
| | Instructional Coach | 1 | 1.0 |
| | k-4 | 1 | 1.0 |
| | K-5 Counselor | 1 | 1.0 |
| | learning leader | 1 | 1.0 |
| | Librarian | 1 | 1.0 |
| | pk | 1 | 1.0 |
| | pre school special educ. | 1 | 1.0 |
| | pre-k | 1 | 1.0 |
| | Pre-K | 2 | 2.0 |
| | Preschool | 1 | 1.0 |
| | reading | 1 | 1.0 |
| | sixth | 1 | 1.0 |
| | special education CDC teacher | 1 | 1.0 |
| | Speech Therapist | 1 | 1.0 |
| | Total | 100 | 100.0 |

Teachers who further defined themselves in the specialist category included six PreK teachers and one PreK Director; three sixth grade teachers; two multiage teachers; one learning leader; one instructional coach; one librarian and one speech therapist and one respondent who wrote “extra curricular” and are shown in Table 3.4. This wide variety of responses is evidence of the structure of the schools today and the many

services offered to students beyond grade level instruction. Teachers in the follow-up interviews described their schools as including preschool for students and including sixth grade and grades beyond. Teachers specializing in reading instruction along with Literacy Coaches and English as a Second Language (ESL) are present in the faculty make-up of elementary schools as well. The respondents to my survey reflect these services and programs for students in our schools today.

**Table 3. 4 Grade Teaching-Other**

| | | Frequency | Percent |
|---|---|---|---|
| Valid | | 80 | 80.0 |
| | art | 1 | 1.0 |
| | art/music | 1 | 1.0 |
| | ESL teacher | 1 | 1.0 |
| | guidance | 1 | 1.0 |
| | Literacy Coach | 1 | 1.0 |
| | Music K-6 | 1 | 1.0 |
| | music pre K-8 | 1 | 1.0 |
| | physical edu | 1 | 1.0 |
| | Physical Education | 1 | 1.0 |
| | reading | 2 | 2.0 |
| | Reading | 1 | 1.0 |
| | Reading and Gifted Ed. | 1 | 1.0 |
| | Resource Elementary | 1 | 1.0 |
| | School Psychologist | 1 | 1.0 |
| | special ed | 1 | 1.0 |
| | Special Education | 1 | 1.0 |
| | Title I | 1 | 1.0 |
| | Title Reading | 1 | 1.0 |
| | visual art | 1 | 1.0 |
| | Total | 100 | 100.0 |

The teachers' who took the online survey reported their educational background. Twenty-nine percent of the teachers who responded had a master's degrees. Teachers with only a bachelor's degree made up twenty-four percent of the respondents. Twenty percent had a master's + additional graduate course work. And additional fourteen

percent of the teachers had an educational specialists degree or Ed.S. Table 3.5 breaks down the educational background of the survey respondents.

**Table 3. 5 Educational Background**

| | | Frequency | Percent |
|---|---|---|---|
| Valid | Bachelors | 24 | 24.0 |
| | Bachelors + graduate | 13 | 13.0 |
| | Masters | 29 | 29.0 |
| | Masters + graduate | 20 | 20.0 |
| | Education Specialist | 14 | 14.0 |
| | Total | 100 | 100.0 |

The teachers were also asked about the schools where they taught. Fifty-nine percent of the respondents' schools were identified as Title 1 schools. The remaining forty-one percent listed their school as "public" as shown in Table 3.6.

**Table 3. 6 Type of School**

| | | Frequency | Percent |
|---|---|---|---|
| Valid | Public | 41 | 41.0 |
| | Public-Title 1 | 59 | 59.0 |
| | Total | 100 | 100.0 |

From Table 3.7, we see that the mean age of the survey respondents was 42.43 years with a standard deviation of 11.421. The mean number of years teaching was 15.37 with a standard deviation of 10.195.

**Table 3. 7 Age and Years Teaching**

| Age and Years Teaching | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | N | Minimum | Maximum | Mean | Std. Deviation |
| Please indicate your age: | 100 | 24 | 68 | 42.43 | 11.421 |
| Please indicate your years teaching: | 100 | 1 | 43 | 15.37 | 10.195 |
| Valid N (listwise) | 100 | | | | |

*Qualitative Participants*

Huck (2008) proposed that "valuable insights can come from the 'voices' of the individuals who serve as research participants and certain studies are clearly limited if they fail to include a qualitative component," (, p. 501). I selected a purposeful sample from the online SDLRS/LPA survey respondents to include in the qualitative interviews. A purposeful sample is one in which the researcher selects a sample to gain further insights, understanding, and the most knowledge (Merriam, 2009). In order to begin purposeful sampling, an initial list of selection criteria are important for narrowing the sample to those participants from whom I could learn the most from this study.

Based on the results of the inventory, I selected teachers who scored "high" and "above average" in self-directed learning readiness for the follow-up participant interviews in the second phase. Throughout the interview process I sought to identify themes that were common to highly self-directed teachers and compare these findings to previous studies (Guglielmino & Hillard, 2007) of other individuals who were also found to rate high on the SDLRS/LPA instrument. Also, I sought to discover from the teachers how, if any, of their learning projects translate into their classrooms.

*Context of the Study*

This study took place in the southeastern United States and involved teachers in various public elementary school settings. It was comprised of two phases: a quantitative phase which addressed question 1: How do elementary teachers rate on the Self-Directed Learning Readiness Scale? and allowed for a purposeful selection of participants for the second, qualitative phase which addressed the remaining questions: 2. Do elementary teachers participate in self-directed learning activities?; 3. What sorts of learning activities do teachers participate in inside and outside of the school environment?; and 4. Do these learning activities translate into the classroom?

*Timeframe of the Study.*

The timeframe for this study was the spring and summer semester of the 2011 school year. From the online site and communications, teachers were able to follow an embedded link to the SDLRS/LPA instrument that was made available online through the instrument vendor. The online website was open to respondents online for a period of two weeks in March which was sufficient to return the 100 responses needed for this project. After this time span, teachers seeking to complete the survey would see a message on screen that indicated the survey was closed and thank them for their interest in participating. After the survey closed, the data were downloaded into a Microsoft Excel file. Identifying personal or demographic informational fields were cut from a copy of the file which was forwarded to Guglielmino and Associates for processing and analysis while the original data file was maintained at the university by the researcher and office

of statistical research. Using the results from the SDLRS/LPA instrument, I ranked the teachers on the SDLRS/LPA and obtained descriptive statistics for my respondent population.

*Phase I*

I purchased and utilized the Self-Directed Learning Readiness Scale [SDLRS/LPA] developed by Guglielmino (1977) as the quantitative element of the study which comprised Phase I. A contract was negotiated between the researcher and the survey developer for the purchase of 101 surveys, for the survey instrument to be posted on the university's server, and for the researcher to apply additional fields for consent, demographic, and contact information which would be obtained by the researcher and maintained for confidentiality. The contract also stated the terms for Guglielmino and Associates to obtain the data from the university within a Microsoft Excel file minus any identifying demographic fields for data analysis. Also stated within the contract was that the Guglielmino survey instrument would maintain their copyright before their survey questions. They would approve an initial test run of the survey instrument and additional questions before the survey link was made active and sent to prospective participants. Once this adapted survey was tested and approved by both parties, it was moved to active status and a live link to the testing site was provided by the university statistics department.

Next, email addresses were obtained from a state education department online database of state school superintendents and school district contacts. In the early spring of

2011, all contacts on the state list were sent an email which stated the purpose of the research study, and requested them to forward the email which also contained the live survey link on to elementary teachers in their respective districts. Three school district supervisors chose to opt their teachers out of the survey due to the impending state TCAP tests in April of that year.

Within the survey, additional demographic questions were added at the beginning of the SDLRS/LPA instrument as well as a closing paragraph where teachers could indicate their willingness to participate in a future interview, to allow the researcher to identify their data and obtain their survey score and information about their learning preference. Teachers taking the survey were assigned a respondent number. The online survey was set-up to allow respondents to drop out of the survey at any time or skip questions by clicking within a box marked 'next.' Included in the online survey closing was permission by the participant to allow Guglielmino and Associates to see their data (without respondent identifiers) for data analysis purposes.

*Phase II*

The qualitative part of my project involved conducting semi-structured, focused interviews with these nine survey respondents. Lincoln and Guba (1985) wrote that the purposes of the interview method of data collection were to obtain constructions of the present, reconstructions of the past, projections of the future, and member checking of constructions developed by researchers. Hatch (2002) explained that interviews are essential if "capturing" the participant's position is a goal of the research.

Merriam (2009) stated that interviewing has been in use for centuries in the form of "census taking, surveys, and opinion polling" (p. 91). Merriam emphasized good questions as the key to obtaining good data and confirms that questions of varying types will yield varying types of answers, thus enabling the researcher to glean information which will target the focus of their study. Hatch (2002) emphasized that the kinds of interviews will be designated by the goals of the research, the research questions and the parameters of the study. Lincoln and Guba (1985) described interviews as being either structured or unstructured. In structured interviews, the researcher initially defines a problem and from that establishes a list of questions for respondents, whereas in unstructured interviews the questions arise from the respondents answers and viewpoint

Merriam (2009) stated that in general interview questions which elicit description and narratives are best for gathering data and there are also questions which should be avoided in interviews. Merriam illustrated four specific types of "good" questions. These include; hypothetical questions - where respondents are asked to describe an ideal situation, the devil's advocate question - where respondents are presented with the opposing side or view, ideal position - where respondents are prompted to tell about their ideal; and interpretive questions - in which the respondents are asked to interpret the researchers' explanation of their responses. Questions which lead the respondent or make assumptions about the answer lean toward obvious bias on the part of the researcher should not be included. Merriam also recommended against simple yes-or-no type questions which can effectively limit or close off any interview.

Merriam (2009) suggested following up good research questions with probes. While impossible to anticipate prior to the actual interview, Merriam stated that researchers can use probes for making adjustments in the interview direction and suggests using a variety of probes. Examples of probes include silence, nodding the head, saying "yes," or "uh huh," and can range from these simple utterances to questions of clarification or seeking more details.

Hatch (2002) described constructivist interviewers as working with the respondents so as to "co-construct understandings that are reported as interpretations or narratives," (p. 23). As a fellow teacher-researcher, my background and own personal experiences with teaching and self-directed learning will enable me to ask questions which will aid in this co-construction of teachers' narratives of their self-directed learning.

Because of my constructivist theoretical framework working within a Quan-Qual research design my interviews were semi-structured. The Interview Guide (see Appendix) consisted of fourteen questions which were asked of the participants in order to gain demographic information as well as open-ended questions to answer my remaining three research questions. Hatch (2002) emphasized that while a researcher uses an interview guide or schedule, they are open to the interview proceeding in the flow the participant takes them. In my interviews, I allowed respondents to answer questions naturally while using a more conversational context. Participants would sometimes address two questions within the reply to one. In the interviews, I tried to maintain a conversational and collegial tone. Being a teacher myself, and introducing myself as a practicing

classroom teacher allowed for an ease of conversation to happen within the interview process.

Participants. After the instrument SDLRS/LPA was administered, I sent emails to those teachers who had (1) scored "high" or "above average" on the instrument and (2) indicated willingness to participate in follow-up interviews in order to gain insight into how their approach to self-directed learning influences their teaching in the classroom as part of the qualitative element of the study. Teachers who replied that they would participate in these follow-up interviews sent a contact phone number, mailing address and time to call for the interview. These participants were sent a consent form to sign along with SASE to return to the researcher. From this list of teachers, I sent emails to the email addresses participants submitted through the online survey. Nine teachers contacted me with phone numbers and times for interviews.

**Table 3.8 Teacher Participants - Phase II**

| Name[1] | SDLRS/LPA Score | Education Attainment | Years of Teaching Experience |
|---|---|---|---|
| Abby | 252 | Bachelors | 15 |
| Becky | 246 | Masters | 29 |
| Caroline | 254 | Ed.S. | 11 |
| Deborah | 272 | Ed.S | 19 |
| Evelyn | 245 | Bachelors | 10 |
| Fiona | 266 | Ed.S | 37 |
| Gilda | 250 | Masters | 38 |
| Helen | 276 | Bachelors | 4 |
| Irene | 257 | Ed.S. | 31 |

[1] All names have been changed to protect respondent confidentiality.

All participants were female. Six had master's degrees including three teachers who had also obtained their education specialist degrees. The range of teaching experience within my interview group was 34 years, with the least experienced teacher having been in the classroom for four years and the most experienced teacher having taught for 38 years.

Procedures. The interviews lasted approximately twenty to thirty-five minutes and took place during the summer months of June and July, 2011. All interviews were conducted over the phone and recorded for subsequent transcription. Because the SDLRS/LPA instrument was made available online the respondents emerged from a statewide geographical base. Participants were sent a letter of consent which informed them of confidentiality measures that were taken. Therefore, participant interviews were conducted via telephone at their convenience. Merriam (2009) emphasized that analyzing data as it is collected is the preferred method of analysis. This method allows the researcher to begin with questions and themes at the very start of collecting to eliminate repetitious and voluminous amounts of data. Therefore data analysis took place with the conclusion of the administration of the online SDLRS/LPA after which, qualitative data analysis ran concurrent to and after the conclusion of respondent interviews.

Analysis. Themes as shown in Table 3.9 were derived from categories developed through convergence of coding of participants' transcripts. Using open coding as described by Merriam (2009), I assigned codes derived from participants' own words, word or phrase repetitions, and key words within participant answers and researcher notations. Transcribed text was then marked and highlighted to sort for common codes

among participant responses in order to seek patterns and commonalities as described by Coffey and Atkinson (1996). Each interview transcript was coded in this manner so that subsequent transcripts could be compared to previous ones. Codes were next combined into lists of groups or conceptual categories which encompassed many codes, quotes, or data. Some codes fit into more than one category.

The movement to interpretation was next as the categories were analyzed for meaning. Because we were working from an interview guide, many of the themes were obvious as answers to its questions. However, additional patterns or themes were mined from the categories which served to illuminate further the self-directed learning practices of elementary teachers and the meaning of that learning in their lives and careers.

**Table 3.9 Themes**

| Theme | Categories | Examples of Codes |
|---|---|---|
| **Creative Selves:** | Learning for Pleasure, Escape, Crafting, Fine Arts, Social Networking, Vacation Learning, Reading for Pleasure, Lifelong Learning | drawing, family of learners, step aerobics, scrapbooking, painting, decorating, "stargazing," museum visits, travel, reading, decorating, sewing curtains, making pillows, baking birthday cakes, musicals, photography, embroidery, smocking, |
| **Professional Selves:** | Researching, Learning Strategies, Professional Networking, Learning Communities, Workshops, Seeking Resources, Classroom Application, Career Learning | Inclusion strategies, technology, Autism spectrum, project-based learning, learning stations, Japan unit, Kabuki dance, Hawaiian unit, Hawaiian dance, gardening, Title I, RTI, tiered interventions, reading instruction, teacher study groups, new position, new placement, career advancement, Praxis |
| **Teachers as Readers:** | Reading to Learn, Reading for Pleasure, Reading for Research, Reading Models, Teachers of Reading, Time for Reading | "I learn by reading," "I read for research," "I read for pleasure," "always reading books," ideas for classroom, no workshops available, prominent author, enrichment, time for moms, modeling reading, staring club, sharing books, recommending books, meeting authors, the sisters, Math their Way |
| **Internet as Resource:** | "My Best Friend is Google," Technology, Availability, Professional Research, Personal Research, Time, Access, Professional Content, Online Learning, | Rural location, internet, innovation, technologies, technology as a learning tool, smart phone, iPad, iPod, Zune, internet hotspot, wifi, vacation, library, YouTube, online learning, Cricket machine, serging machine,web 2.0 |
| **Teacher Self-Directed Partnerships:** | Teacher Study Groups, Learning Partners, Mentors, Online Community, Professional Learning Communities, Teaching Teams, Book Clubs | Begin alone, join up, partners, groups, group learning, book clubs, workshop travel, collaboration, school, outside school, community, moms, friends, small town, students, sharing with teachers, |
| **Application of Learning in the Classroom:** | "Tweaked it," "Made it my own," Standards, Teachers as Readers, Modeling, Classroom Units, Integrated Lessons, Projects, Discussions, Strategies, Technology, Themes, Cultures, Book Clubs | Learning units, lesson plans, classroom themes, grade level standards, modeling reading, improving teaching skills, strategies, inquiry learning, integrate subjects, projects, disco ball, classroom improvements, grant funding, schoolwide project, garden project, |
| **Teacher Reflection on Practice:** | Validation, Partnerships, Changed Expectations, Evaluation, Feedback from Others, Professional Growth, Personal Growth, Professional Communities, Continued Learning, Career | Feel more capable, gained experience, identity validation, recognition, student reactions, joy to learn, change career path, job application, move on, |

*Trustworthiness*

In Phase II, participants were interviewed and these interviews were digitally recorded and transcribed by the researcher and analyzed for themes related to the research questions. Constructivists contend that the assessment of the trustworthiness of qualitative data and analysis should be congruent with their philosophical assumptions. In assuming that multiple realities exist, and that knowledge is created by the learner; a one, definable "truth" is unattainable. Assuming a constructivist's stance, I followed Lincoln and Guba's (1985) four criteria for trustworthiness within qualitative or naturalistic studies: credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability.

Credibility. Merriam (2009) explained that "because human beings are the primary instrument of data collection and analysis in qualitative research, interpretations of reality are accessed directly through their observations and interviews" (p. 25). Credibility addresses "internal validity" from the constructivist's perspective. Credibility denotes the reliability between the participants' constructions of their realities and the researcher's subsequent representations of this data. In my interviews, I recorded teachers' words and spent active, prolonged engagement (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Merriam, 2009) within the data collected until I began to see and hear the same themes and data repeatedly resulting in data satiation. Referential adequacy of transcripts was maintained through archived digital recordings of interviews. From my lens as a researcher and as a practicing elementary teacher I maintained the learned context of trust that Lincoln and Guba (1985) assert is essential to establish credibility. It is within this context that these data are represented.

Transferability. While generalizability in the sense of quantitative research is not viable through a qualitative investigation, it is possible to provide “thick description” to enable the possibility of transfer by the potential appliers (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). As researcher, I have provided thick descriptions of participants’ self-directed learning experiences and activities. These details will enable readers to determine the transferability of the findings and results into their own contexts.

Dependability and Confirmability. Dependability is, in essence, "reliability" from the qualitative standpoint. The dependability of any particular study relates to whether it can be replicated with the same or similar participants within a similar context and have, as the end result, the same or similar findings. From a constructivist perspective, inasmuch as each participant constructs their own reality, “replication of a qualitative study will not yield the same results,” (Merriam, 2009 p. 222).

Confirmability. This corresponds to the "objectivity" of the findings. Qualitative researchers within a constructivist framework bring their own knowledge into their research. Conducting internal audits serves to examine the process of inquiry, establishes dependability, and also examines the product and interpretations which attest to the confirmability of the study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). To audit my study, I kept digital recordings of raw data of actual interviews and transcriptions of interviews by participants. The data from these transcriptions in the form of process notes of codes and themes were maintained in research notebooks. In auditing my study, I examined my findings and recommendations to ensure they were supported by the data collected from this investigation as recommended by Lincoln and Guba (1985). These findings can be

traced back through the data process to the raw data, illustrating the audit trail which I have maintained. Throughout the reporting of my findings, I offered readers the data in the form of quotations from participants to confirm my conclusions and recommendations of the study.

*Chapter Summary*

In this chapter, I explain the methodology behind my project design. I used a two phase, Qual-Quan mixed methods design which allowed for selection of a purposeful sample using the SDLS/LPA instrument. This instrument was placed online in order to identify elementary teachers who were high or above average in self-directed learning. Those respondents who also left contact information were emailed about participating in a follow-up interview. Nine participants were interviewed via telephone and those interviews were transcribed for coding and identification of themes.

# Chapter 4: Results

*Introduction*

Within this chapter, I describe the results for this two-phase, Qual-Quan research project. 100 elementary teachers from a southeastern state participated in an online survey which contained the SDLRS/LPA Self-Directed Learning Readiness Scale. Their results are presented in this chapter along with results from interviews with nine of the respondents.

*Phase I: Quantitative Analysis of SDLRS/LPA*

For this study, I analyzed descriptive data of the 100 survey respondents to the SDLRS/LPA instrument. Demographical frequency tables describe these respondents. My first research question was:

1. How do elementary teachers rate on the Self-Directed Learning Readiness Scale [SDLRS/LPA]?

This first question was addressed through the analysis of elementary teachers' SDLRS/LPA scores from the online survey instrument. Guglielmino (2011) reported that the adult mean on the SDLRS/LPA is 214 with the standard deviation of 25.59. In interpreting scores, scores are categorized that fall into five ranges. Scores between 58-176 are categorized as "Low" readiness for self-directed learning. Scores falling between 177-201 are in the "Below Average" category. Scores between 202-226 are considered "Average" readiness for self-directed learning. Scores between 227-251 are "Above Average" and scores between "252-290" are categorized as "High" readiness for self-

directed learning. Guglielmino (2011) includes a description of the types of jobs persons who score high on the SDLRS/LPA would perform better. Those jobs would contain tasks which would contain a higher proportion of problem solving, creativity, and change. Persons scoring high choose to determine their learning needs and go about implementing that learning whereas the average scorer would not be as comfortable in those situations which require them to be the sole planner of their learning needs. Those with low scores would prefer structured learning situations such as formal classrooms and courses. The ratings of the teachers are shown in Table 4.1.

**Table 4. 1 Ratings of 100 Elementary Teachers on SDLRS/LPA**

| Category | Score Range | Number of Teachers | Percentage of Teachers |
|---|---|---|---|
| Low | 58-176 | 0 | 0% |
| Below Average | 177-201 | 5 | 5% |
| Average | 202-226 | 19 | 19% |
| Above Average | 227-251 | 43 | 43% |
| High | 252-290 | 33 | 33% |

For the teachers in this study [N=100], the mean was 240.89 with a standard deviation of 2.019. The range was 91 and the variance was 407.735. This score fell within the “above average” range which indicated the teachers had developed an above average readiness for self-directed learning and determination of their own learning needs and goals and the ability to plan and carry out their own learning (Guglielmino, 2011). The distribution of these scores is shown in the histogram in Figure 4.1.

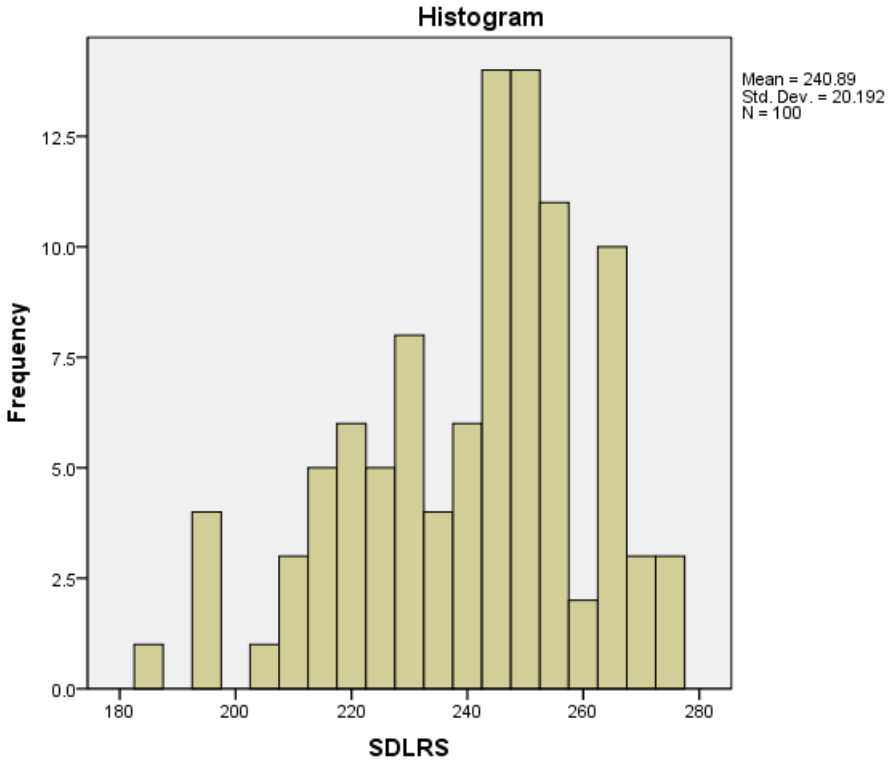


**Figure 4. 1 Histogram of Participant SDLRS/LPA Scores**

*Phase II: Qualitative Analysis of Teacher Interviews*

For Phase II, I used teacher interviews to identify key themes and topic areas which are predicated upon my remaining three research questions.

2. Do elementary teachers participate in self-directed learning activities?

3. What sorts of learning activities do teachers participate in outside of the school environment?

4. Do these learning activities translate into the classroom?

The teachers who participated in these interviews were nine of the participants from Phase I who were rated "high" or "above average" on the SDLRS/LPA and who were willing to be interviewed. They are listed in Table 4.2 below.

**Table 4. 2 Teacher Participants Phase II**

| Name[2] | SDLRS/LPA Score | Education Attainment | Years of Teaching Experience | Grade Level or Teaching Assignment |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Abby | 252 | Bachelors | 15 | Art and Music |
| Becky | 246 | Masters | 29 | 1st Grade |
| Caroline | 254 | Ed.S. | 11 | 3rd Grade |
| Deborah | 272 | Ed.S | 19 | Reading Specialist |
| Evelyn | 245 | Bachelors | 10 | 3rd Grade |
| Fiona | 266 | Ed.S | 37 | Librarian |
| Gilda | 250 | Masters | 38 | 1st grade - Preschool Director |
| Helen | 276 | Bachelors | 4 | 3rd Grade |
| Irene | 257 | Ed.S. | 31 | Special Education |

*Teacher Self-Directed Learning: Creative Selves and Professional Selves*

I found that the elementary teachers that I surveyed and interviewed do participate in self-directed learning activities. What was apparent in my research is that for the teachers, these activities fell into two categories: activities which were categorized as creative outlets for the teachers and did not necessarily relate to their teaching profession

[2] All names have been changed to protect respondent confidentiality.

and those professional learning projects which were closely tied to their teaching or professional selves.

Teachers define learning. Initially, I asked the teacher participants to define learning. Many teachers paused, stymied at how to put their definition into words, others needed clarification on whether the question was about their own learning or that of their students. Becky, a second grade teacher asked, "I don't know how to put that into words. Do you mean my learning or the children's learning?" Irene, a special education teacher related learning in this way:

> It is those behaviors which are truly learned. Skills that a child doesn't come with. You have to teach them. They also have to be able to discern between at home and at school, in the public, out on the playground, those types of things. So learning is a lifelong endeavor that we all go through.

I found this would be a common occurrence in my interviews as the line for teachers between their learning and designing learning for their students blurred at times. Such is the world of teaching and the teachers' concept of selves meshed with their professional identities. With additional prompting and further reflection teachers responded about their learning in these ways:

> "For me, learning is to expand what I don't know."
>
> "That's just a lifelong process. You are going to learn until the day you die."
>
> "It is where you just have a need to know something."

> "Like in education, I would go and learn new methods and it wouldn't be something that I was required to do, it was just something that I wanted to do to improve my teaching in the classroom."

Teachers as lifelong learners. What I found central to teachers' comments was how many of them saw that learning was a lifelong and active endeavor which takes place outside the confines of the classroom and was an integral part of their identity as teachers. These teachers were always learning and seeking out knowledge which often was initiated from situations within their own classrooms, job or grade level transitions, student behavior, or district mandates which left them needing or desiring more knowledge.

The majority of teachers expressed how they learned in terms that are used in designing and creating lessons for their students. Teachers reported that they were "hands-on" learners, preferring to learn by doing or "kinesthetic learners," Deborah, a reading specialist with 19 years of teaching experience described how she learned:

> I've got to get in there and do it and work my way through the problems that I encounter. So, that's the way I learn best. I have to be approached with problems that I need to find solutions for, then I've got to get in there and work it out…and sometimes it's an unconventional way, but rarely is it because a teacher stood up and lectured to me.

Fiona, a 37-year teaching veteran and currently a librarian described the way in which she learned: "I learn best hands-on. If I can see it, do it, take it apart, put it back together, I'm good on it. If I just hear it, you know, it doesn't really sink in."

A third grade teacher with ten years experience, Evelyn reported that she learned best through trial and error application. "I really learn best when I apply it in the classroom and do trial and error and see how it works best for me when I teach."

Many teachers coupled this description with also needing visuals or having to "see it" to be able to learn. Deborah described herself as being an experiential learner which she saw as being unconventional in the traditional sense of learning. The sole elementary fine arts teacher, Abby, replied that she was an "auditory" learner, learning best through sound and music.

Reading was often described as a pathway or gateway to learning. Caroline reported that she was "…definitely more of a language-based learner, just reading something on my own," and confessed that:

> I enjoy reading more than anything. I try to be a hands-on teacher, because I know that is research based, and I know it helps children but I am definitely more of a language based learner, just reading something on my own.

Expressed in their interviews was the feeling for these teachers that learning was a need that they had to fulfill. Again, learning as a "lifelong endeavor" beginning in their own childhood and continuing through their own schooling, career, and until "the day you die." Their learning was modeled for them by their parents and witnessed by their own

children and continued through their various stages of life. "I live close to my mom…she's in her eighties and she's still learning," Fiona said as she explained her self-directed learning and offered her mother as a role model for how she planned to continue learning throughout her life. Deborah described how compelling learning was:

> I think that, that it is where you just have a need to know something. Where you don't need to know it the learning's probably not going to take place. As for myself, I just have to always be learning something. If I'm not learning something, I'm just bored…I just wanna take on something all the time.

*Teacher Learning Activities*

Teachers' creative selves. The teachers that I interviewed listed many types of creative learning projects which they pursued. Just as Deborah described how compelling learning was for her, teachers often described these activities as lifelong interests or projects that they "had to try" and pursued for pleasure or out of curiosity. Deborah related her interest in scuba diving as something that she thought would be interesting to try. She described her initial interest in the sport was due to the fact that it was a "thinking man's sport" which required having to learn about "depth and pressure." She enjoyed learning about sports which require a fair amount of thinking and problem solving. This coincides with many teachers who also saw learning as a sort of challenge to overcome.

Gilda, a former first grade teacher and current preschool director discussed her creative learning project. "I'm learning to smock," she said. She described smocking as a type of sewing decoration that was traditionally used to decorate children's clothing.

While she explained that she had no grandchildren of her own, it was something that she always wanted to learn how to do and to create for the grandchildren of her friends. She knew how to sew and embroider and had an embroidery machine, yet smocking was something that she felt she wanted to master, as years before it had been such a challenge for her. Abby, the fine arts teacher explored jewelry making in her free time:

> Because I am an artist, I don't get a lot of free opportunities because I am creating lesson plans for other kids. And I have a family, so it [jewelry making] is something that I can do easily in my free time.

Teachers' professional selves. The learning activities mentioned by teachers most often were the self-directed learning activities that teachers pursued related to their professional selves. All the teachers in my interviews related self-directed learning activities as investigations into ways to improve their teaching in their classroom in order to improve their student learning.

Teachers chose these self-directed learning activities as a means of supporting or enhancing their current teaching strategies and methodologies or as a result of dissatisfaction with the status quo in their classroom. Caroline, a third grade teacher, discussed a change in her classroom situation. The previous school year, she had two students who were autistic, a new experience for her as a general education teacher. She related that she had to "do a lot of research," and found out about the autism spectrum and that her students were on opposite ends in behavior and abilities. Through her research, she was able to advocate for her students in order to meet their needs in the

classroom and get the services she felt her students deserved. In regard to her self-directed learning Caroline stated, “professionally, it just happens to be what was going on in my classroom that particular year.” During her present year at the time of the interview, she was dealing with an openly defiant student. She investigated and found a free teacher workshop on behavior disorders and disabilities that could help her with her student in the classroom.

Other teachers recounted how they initiated their self-directed learning activities as a reaction to transition, grade level moves, or district mandates. Deborah, a current reading specialist, detailed how when she first became a talented and gifted teacher that she “took so many conferences, gifted conferences and just read books after books,” to help her with her position. Later on in her career, she was asked to do reading interventions by her curriculum director. “I didn’t have a clue what that would entail.” She described how she “took off” and learned everything that she could. She realized that those techniques that she utilized in her classroom as a general educator wouldn’t work for students with dyslexia or other reading disabilities. She investigated the Orton-Gillingham reading method, several comprehension strategies and other methods that she hadn’t needed to know as a general education teacher in order to become proficient in her new position. These were additional investigations initiated on her own.

*Teachers as readers*

For teachers, reading is their initial starting point for their learning projects. Abby, the fine arts teacher, said that when she was trying to learn something on her own she began by reading a book. Books are a major resource of information for these teachers. A book recommendation from a friend, principal or colleague can be a springboard for individual research. Caroline reported that for her personal interests, books were what interested her. This interest translated into her professional life as well for when she was researching autism in her classroom, she did a lot of research which began with reading books on autism.

Teachers were able to cite the author of those strategies and methodologies they had learned, through reading, to implement for their classroom. Becky, a second grade teacher said that she was "always reading books related to teaching and research and going to workshops," and added for her creative self that she even taught herself to crochet by reading a book and "just doing it." For her professional self, Becky's reading and research led her to travel to Portland, Oregon to attend a workshop by "The 2 Sisters," Gail Boushey and Joan Moser, who had developed another approach to teaching literacy in their classrooms.

Gilda, the new preschool director, recalled a time when she was researching ways to incorporate learning centers into her classroom:

> That's when I saw the Debbie Dillar book. I got to reading one of her books and it sort of piqued my interest and I kept working and working till I could find where she was doing a workshop.

Irene, a special education teacher for grades K-8 explained an experience with a teacher compensation program for her state. After moving from a state in the west, she learned that her current state offered a compensation incentive package that was new to her. She investigated the program and reported that:

> I did a lot of investigation…in order to enhance my learning and to participate in something that I felt like would be a good match for me. So I went through that and I remember that being a time that I had to do a lot of self-motivation to get information. I'm a real searcher for new strategies and the different ways that I might be able to teach my students.

Teachers were also readers who initiated collaborative learning groups centered around a specific strategy. Evelyn investigated learning projects for her third grade class. She formed a reading group around the book*, Inquiry Circles in the Elementary Classrooms* by Stephanie Harvey. She explained that she had first studied the book on her own, then formed a reading group with nine other teachers who wanted to learn about strategies along with her. At the time of our interview, her group had been trying the methods in the classroom and meeting together to discuss how they were working. "It was just phenomenal!" Evelyn said when describing the strategies she learned. Still yet, Caroline also formed a book circle with other teachers in her school:

> …it's strictly for fun. I mean we do discuss school issues since we all work at the same school. You know we do discuss our job, but it is really more of a personal

kind. We were all moms who run with our children constantly. We are never doing anything but schoolwork….we just decided that we were going to take a one time a month and make time for us with no kids. We decided to do a book club since we always talk about what we are reading.

*"My Best Friend is Google"*

The internet was the most often cited resource for teacher self-directed learning, serving as a jumping-off point for teachers who were able to "search" and "Google" terms of interest which led to more research. Teachers described being able to investigate types and locations of workshops available to them on the specific strategy they were investigating. From these investigations, they were able to schedule time and family around the workshop or training. Teachers often stated that their location in rural communities was no longer a barrier to learning with the internet as a resource. Along with workshops, and books, teachers were also able to use email to contact mentors - those experts in the area they were learning.

Fiona, the school librarian, uses the internet to learn about trends in children's literature and top book selections for her students. "I've put in more modern reading selections; they have just been greatly improved. I did away with a lot of the old stuff they are not going to read and put in [books] they are going to read…you can access on the internet. Even Amazon.com…tells me what's out there." Helen, a third grade teacher who was suddenly faced with her first year as an inclusion teacher without support from her

district said, “ I had to look a lot online and try to find books about teaching in an inclusion classroom. So that’s one area I had to go out and find stuff on my own.”

Evelyn’s creative interest in dance, combined with a bit of internet research on cultures led her to learn about the dances of Hawaii. “I researched it. I found dances on YouTube that I thought the kids could easily learn. So I learned it myself and then I took it to school and taught it to them.” Researching a way to teach another culture, Evelyn used her self-directed learning of cultural dances and directly brought that insight and knowledge to her students. Gilda, also used YouTube for her self-directed learning on her smocking projects. “I live in a small town so I can’t always get to classes in the bigger cities. What I’ve done is get on the internet and find somebody actually doing it. Then I go and try that, and you can keep watching it over and over again.”

In addition, these teachers’ self-directed learning aided them in other, more formal types of learning. Deborah, when pursuing her master’s degree found herself far from the availability of professors and a quite a distance in time from her last research paper. She relied heavily on the internet as a resource to self-direct her learning about how to write a research paper. Now, she finds herself sharing this information with other teachers who need help in writing papers. “So, you know, I just go online and tried to learn as much as I could. Thank goodness for the internet!”

Technology was the gateway for many self-directed learning projects. Teachers were also learning about and utilizing the latest technology such as smart phones, e-readers, and tablets along with web 2.0 applications. Caroline utilized Amazon’s Kindle e-reader for her pleasure reading group. Fiona confessed that while she was on vacation

and her family was swimming in the pool, she was poolside learning about her newest job transition from elementary librarian to middle school librarian: "I spent my time at the pool on the internet looking up ways to make a good middle school library." Gilda utilized a cell phone carrier's "hotbox" so that she can have uninterrupted internet access at home in the rural area where she lives as well. She also learned about her tablet, the Motorola Zoom:

> I didn't want to get left behind on some of the technology as I get advanced in age. My husband died two years ago, so I am staying busy of course. I am trying lots of different projects that I can do that I feel like will probably keep me on top of things and then it will also help me in the classroom, too.

*Teacher Self-Directed Learning Partnerships*

The teachers in this study did use and discuss their learning activities with their students and fellow teachers. While self-directed learning implies a solitary learner, my teacher participants were not alone in their self-directed learning projects. Many teachers mentioned "partnering up" with another teacher or friend after a topic of learning is chosen. While teachers asserted that the initial investigation and research into the topic is done solo, afterward a partner, often another teacher if the learning project is professionally based, is found. If the project is a creative project, family and friends are often asked to "join up." Together, the partners attend workshops, teach each other skills or trade and bounce ideas off of each other. A partner may act as a sounding board before entering into a larger group learning community.

Abby reported that she will utilize the internet to make that connection to a learning partner or mentor, “You know people who aren’t in my subject area. I teach with a lot of really intelligent people. I will pick their brains as well.” Caroline did the same when she partnered with a couple of other teachers to learn about inclusion. Together they visited other schools and classrooms where inclusion was in place in order to implement it in their own classrooms successfully. Without the necessary supports from her administration and special education department, she felt this was necessary to do her job well.

Fiona paired with another woman in trading learning projects. She had just acquired a Cricket machine for cutting out shapes and letters electronically. Another woman had a recently purchased serge machine, a sewing machine that cuts the raw edge of the fabric as it sews and finishes seams. Fiona was already an expert at the serge machine and the other woman also had the Cricket machine. So, they agreed to a learning partnership where each one acted as a mentor/teacher to the other. Fiona found that this benefited her as she used her new knowledge in creating displays and bulletins in her library. Gilda also noted a friend to whom she was able to go in learning smocking techniques: “She jumped right in, so we are doing it together.”

Helen’s interests lie in visiting museums and in photography. She merged the two interests and takes advantage of trips to city museums around the country, taking photographs to bring back to the classroom. She partnered with her father who is a photographer. Later in the classroom, she brought in these photographs to show her students to enrich their learning.

Teacher learning partnerships are not limited to two people. After an initial pairing or partnering, the teacher will often form or join a group with the same or similar learning goal in mind. This is what Fiona did when she formed a teacher reading group centered on the book, *Inquiry Circles in the Elementary Classroom* by Stephanie Harvey. As a group, the teachers studied the strategies and techniques and tried them out in their classrooms.

Again, as with the types of self-directed learning projects these book clubs fell into two categories, professional purposes or pleasurable purposes. Caroline was involved in a book group with other teachers and parents from her community "just for fun." She reported that the group formed out of a need to break away from their constant roles as parents and teachers. So, they arranged to meet once a month to talk about what they were reading.

Out of this discussion I discovered that Caroline also developed a "little community" of professional learners as well after she initiated a self-directed learning project. She invited other teachers and professionals who were also interested in learning about the same topics she was interested in. However, while she would join up or invite other members into her group, she stressed that these were usually topics which she initiated on her own. Evelyn said the same:

> I'll start learning on my own, but then I love talking about it. So I want to find other people that are interested in the same things as me so that we can bounce ideas off each other. I always learn great things from other people and their ideas.

Other learning partnerships involved groups working as teaching teams. One teacher's investigations would lead to collaborative planning among a group. Evelyn had the opportunity to bring her love of dance into the classroom by teaching her students to dance the Hawaiian Hula dance. She was part of her grade level team's investigation into the Hawaiian culture. Each teacher investigated a different aspect of the Hawaiian culture with one teacher taking volcanoes and teaching their students the science and geology behind the volcanoes of Hawaii and another teacher taking the food and animal resources and teaching Hawaiian cuisine. Gilda provided another example of a teaching team when she used her experience as a quilt maker to develop story quilts which were shared not only by teachers in her grade level, but also as a school wide project later on. Helen's investigations into astronomy and atmosphere led to teamwork when she shared her learning with teachers at her school to enable them to create lessons for their students as well.

Occasionally, however, teachers could be met with resistance to sharing their learning efforts. Teachers mentioned having negative reception at their school when they shared or applied their self-directed learning projects. Fiona related being met with negative reactions when she initiated technology for teachers through the school library. "A lot [of teachers] were afraid of technology." These colleagues were resistant and balked at learning because of their fears.

Becky's own personal interests in learning about gardening spurred a garden project for her first graders. After doing research and matching her ideas to standards in math and science for her students and bringing in books for her students, she set about

creating a garden in her school. However she also found that teachers at her school were not receptive to her project. “At that time, I was teaching with some negative teachers. A lot of teachers would watch it. I don’t think that many thought it was beneficial...but I saw a lot of benefits in it.” The teachers in this study valued partnerships, and regretted when they were not possible with their teacher colleagues.

*Teacher Application of Learning in the Classroom*

Teacher learning activities did translate to the classroom. Teachers surprised themselves when reflecting upon even the areas of creative learning they undertook that translated into classroom strategies, lessons, and modeling for their students along with the professional self-directed learning they undertook.

Making it “my own.” Those teachers who sought out their own professional development through self-directed learning admitted that while they often attended workshops, read books, and sought mentors, they were “always tweaking” these strategies and methodologies to “make it my own.” Evelyn related an instance where she and other teachers visited the Ron Clark Academy. She was impressed with a celebration device that was used in the classroom as a reward. A button was pressed and a disco ball dropped from the ceiling. Music played and the students were allowed to dance. She “tweaked” this idea and developed her own “freak out” dance that students could use to celebrated hard work and that allowed them to have movement in the classroom. Without the hardwired technology of an elaborate disco ball, Evelyn was still able to analyze a

reward method and merge it with her personal interest in dance and create a reward dance of her own.

The teachers who pursue reading as learning also bring that experience into their classrooms. Becky used in her interest in reading to model to her students as part of her reading instruction. "I mean just when I teach reading, even in first grade, I talk about what good readers do and what I as a reader do." Caroline does that as well when she sets up book clubs in her classroom. She discusses the fact that she and other teachers in the school make up their own book club:

> We see students out at various community events. You know, we'll all have our books and Kindles out and the kids will come up and say, 'What are you doing?' We say, 'Hey Mrs. Jones and I are in a book club and this is a book [referring to the Kindle].

Deborah even modeled her self-directed learning process to her students. "They know I'm always learning. I involve them in it and tell them what I've learned." When teaching, if they come upon a fact or something they don't know, she will stop and model for her students how she goes about researching to solve the problem. "I don't think a lot of times kids have good models of that in their homes." The teachers I interviewed gave examples of bringing their learning into the classroom and developing lessons for their students. And these were not random arts and craft sessions or cookie-cutter coloring sheets. Teachers were careful to match their developing lessons to grade level standards as Becky did when she created her garden using standards for math and science. Deborah

summed up most of the teachers attitudes about standards when she said that if her students were able to learn to problem solve and think for themselves, the state assessed standards achievement would happen for them. The teachers saw the value in translating that love of learning to their students.

*Teacher Reflection on Practice*

The teachers interviewed for this study professed they were life-long learners. One project often led to another and then another. They were always striving to improve their craft and improve upon their capacity as teachers. In their pursuit of learning they were able to find self-validation for their work. I found that while teachers were often required or mandated to learn or train in certain strategies and methodologies, these teachers recognized the distinction between what was required of the job and what they felt they must be learning as part of their own self validation as a teacher. Gilda said,

> Like in education, I would go and learn new methods and it wouldn't be something that I was required to do, it was just something that I wanted to do to improve my teaching in the classroom.

The teachers' validation could be found in forged partnerships, in recognition for the strategies used in their classrooms, and through solicitation by others for their expertise. Yet, while teachers appreciated any validation they received, they moved on to their next learning goal or project. Fiona, the librarian, had completely updated her elementary school's library and added new technologies such as iPads, laptops and iPods.

She had made elaborate bulletin boards and updated the book selections and had received lots of praise for her work. Yet, at the time of our interview she was planning to leave her library behind to start work at a middle school:

> I'm walking away from it. I'm turning around and walking away from it and going to one that needs to be worked on. I felt like I'd gone as far as I could go at that school. I think I had a great library for the kids, but there just wasn't a whole lot left to improve on. I can go to the middle school library…trying to make it the best library, because libraries now are so much of a media center now. They are not just a place to get a book anymore.

Throughout the interviews, teachers, while enthusiastic about their self-directed learning projects, were able to identify pitfalls and stumbling blocks they have faced along the way. Non-supportive administrators, "the powers that be," could hamper implementation of strategies and lessons inside and outside the classroom. One teacher who designed a lesson around her sewing and embroidery skills had to bring in volunteers to sew for her students because the "powers that be" would not allow the students to sew themselves. Other teachers in the grade level or school can become a stumbling block if they are not open to or are critical of the method or strategies being implemented.

*Summary of Qualitative Results*

The results of my study show that teachers who took my online survey were high or above average in self-directed learning readiness. Teachers I interviewed did

participate in self-directed learning activities and participated in many types of learning activities. These activities I categorized as investigations of their creative selves and professional selves. The teachers in this study offered many illustrations into the ways they translated their self-directed learning activities not only into the classroom, but also as partners with their friends and fellow teachers.

Figure 4.2 illustrates the self-directed learning process used by the elementary teachers in this study. They start with an idea or an interest which they explore through one or more pathways: by partnering with a fellow learner, by reading, by using the internet, and/or by seeking out a mentor. From there, they might collaborate in groups or attend workshops on their way to practicing and using their new learning. Finally, they reflect and decide where or if to re-enter the process. Validation comes when they experience success as learners.

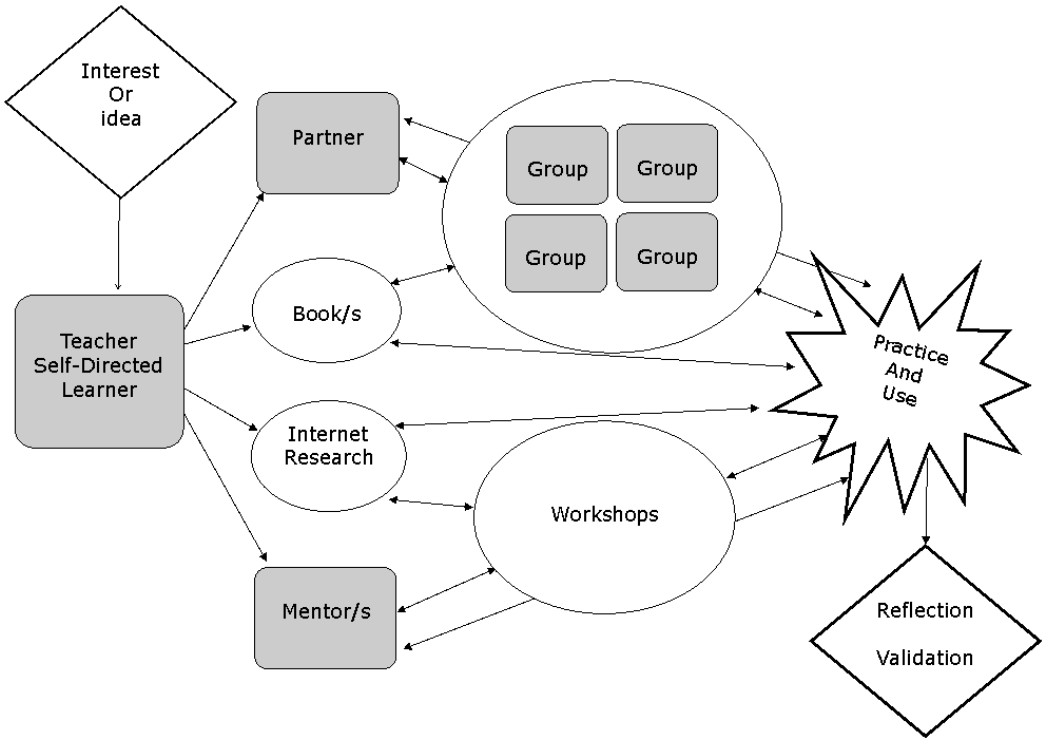


**Figure 4. 2 Self-Directed Learning Process of Elementary Teachers**

Upon further examination of this process, this study reveals that not only do teachers plan, coordinate, and conduct their self-directed learning, but also that this learning paralleled conditions (discussed in chapter two above) that have been found to be present in successful professional development that leads to increased student learning. Specifically, the teachers' own learning met the following criteria:

1. Teachers had *autonomy and agency* in that they decided what they would learn based upon their personal interests or ideas for their classroom.
2. Teacher learning was *sustained over time* as teachers learned, developed, and established their craft.

3. Teachers established or joined a *learning community* in the form of book clubs, team collaboration, or learning groups.
4. Teachers often sought *outside experts* in the form of mentors/authors.

*Chapter Summary*

This chapter has discussed the results of the four research questions. Phase I addressed the first research question regarding the self-directed learning readiness of elementary teachers. The quantitative data revealed that teachers taking the online SDLRS/LPA demonstrated a significant readiness for self-directed learning. Phase II examined questions two through four via qualitative interviews. The second question sought insight into whether elementary teachers participated in self-directed learning activities. The nine teachers interviewed for this study all participated in self-directed learning. Question three addressed the sorts of learning activities the teachers participated in outside of the school environment. Teachers participated in creative and professional learning projects outside of school. The final question investigated whether or not the teachers' learning activities outside of school translated into their classroom. The teachers self-directed learning pursuits translated to classroom activities and were shared with partners, their colleagues and learning communities.

# Chapter 5 Discussion

*Introduction*

This study has examined the self-directed learning readiness of elementary school teachers and their self-directed learning practices. This final chapter will provide a discussion of the results of the study based on the four research questions, the study's conclusions, and the implications for future research and practice. This Quan-Qual study consisted of two phases. Phase I addressed question one: How do elementary teachers rate on the Self-Directed Learning Readiness Scale/ Learning Preference Assessment [SDLR/LPA]? One hundred elementary school teachers in a southeastern state were surveyed online with the SDLRS/LPA instrument and were found to be significant in their readiness for self-directed learning. Phase II addressed the remaining three questions:

- Do elementary teachers participate in self-directed learning activities?
- What sorts of learning activities do teachers participate in outside of the school environment?
- Do these learning activities translate into the classroom?

Nine participants who scored "high" or "above average" on the SDLRS/LPA were interviewed about their self-directed learning activities. This study sheds light on the self-directed learning practices of this little-researched group in the area of self-directed learning. The results of this investigation show that self-directed learning can be engaging and powerful professional development.

This investigation was grounded within two models of self-directed learning: Brockett and Heimestra's (1991) Personal Responsibility Orientation PRO-model and Grow's (1991) Staged Self-Directed Learning Model. The PRO-model was selected as a basis for examining the teacher as learner and the Staged-Self-Directed Learning Model (Grow, 1991) for examining self-directed teacher historically as teacher.

The PRO-Model illustrates the personal characteristics of a learner, in this study, the elementary teachers as learners and the external factors that predispose individuals to pursuing, planning and implementing their learning projects along with those internal personality characteristics that allow an individual to accept responsibility for learning. By sampling 100 elementary teachers and investigating their self-directed learning readinesss through the SDLRS/LPA instrument, we were able show significant results. Further interviews with nine teachers who scored "high" or "above average" revealed a propensity for self-directed learning in two areas of their personalities: their creative selves and their professional selves.

Teachers in this study were self-directed, describing many diverse self-directed learning projects from jewelry making to scuba-diving. However, what also became apparent is that teachers were also undertaking their own self-directed professional development. All teachers discussed their ongoing learning projects for improving their teaching, improving their classroom and improving student learning.

*Conclusions*

Not "bored out of my gourd:" Self-directed learning is engaging, powerful professional development. Self-directed learning can be engaging, powerful professional development in comparison to prescribed, top-down, mandated professional development. This study shows that teachers who are self-directed in their learning were compelled to research and conduct their own professional learning. In fact, their personal character was such that they are driven to continuously pursue learning which will improve their content area knowledge and their teaching methodologies. And, perhaps more importantly, they enjoy it.

When the teachers in this study found that professional development did not meet the immediate needs of their classroom, they planned and sought additional knowledge on their own. Their learning, actually included characteristics that research has found to be essential for successfully implemented professional development that results in improved student achievement (Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 1995; Darling-Hammond, et al., 2009; Gabriel, Day, & Allington, 2011; Gilrane, et al., 2008).:

1. offering sense of autonomy and ownership
2. sustained over time
3. creating or a professional learning community,
4. seeking mentors and experts

Autonomy. Teachers in this study chose the path of their learning which enabled them to have ownership of their learning. For their professional selves, they reflected on

needs of their students, their content knowledge needs, and needs of their school in choosing areas to pursue. This understanding of the need for learning along with full ownership of the learning process permitted change to take place. Morrow and Casey (2004) reported that motivation for change is highly individual. When teachers identify the need and self-direct their learning change is the result. Teachers mentioned how their teaching was changed through the professional self-directed learning projects they undertook. The intrinsic motivation which spawned their self-directed learning projects was often brought about by teacher compulsion for learning and their own viewpoint that they could always be improving. These viewpoints fit research on exemplary teachers (Allington & Johnston, 2001; Haberman, 1995).

Self-directed learning for these elementary school teachers grew out of those intrinsic characteristics of the learner as illustrated in the PRO-model (Ralph. G. Brockett & Hiemstra, 1991). And because their self-directed learning was a natural outcome of these intrinsic characteristic, these teachers experienced engaged autonomy often described by exemplary teachers (Gabriel, et al., 2011) . Teachers whose self-directed learning led to successes in the classroom were able to show their results to their principals rather than be mandated to produce results through scripted or prescribed methods. When teachers experienced this freedom in decision making and were commended by colleagues, parents, and administrators, they felt validated as professionals.

Sustained over time. I found that these teachers were intensively engaged in their learning projects for extended periods of time. Teachers would begin with research and

investigation and move toward connecting with partners, reading books, seeking mentors and joining or building communities of learning. This necessitated extended learning and planning and commitment on their part and persistence. Again, qualities desirous of exemplary teachers.

Teacher-created professional learning communities and mentors. The teachers in this study involved in self-directed learning were not learning on their own. They created partnerships and formed professional learning communities within their schools as grade level teams, groups working on a shared goal, and as teachers reading books. The power of learning communities is documented in professional development research (Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 1995; Darling-Hammond, et al., 2009; Gabriel, et al., 2011; Gilrane, et al., 2008; Richardson, 2003). However, the need is documented, but what is hard to escape is the contrived collegiality that Hargreaves and Dawe (1990) found was so often foisted on teachers as they go through the motions of prescribed professional development. Nevertheless, through self-directed learning, teachers willingly build communities of learning, seeking out other like minded learners or motivating others to join them on their journey - their enthusiasm for learning contagious.

Impact on student achievement: While we have no information on whether these teachers' students experienced enhanced achievement, research tells us that exemplary teachers do share their personal learning with their students (Allington & Johnston, 2001; Haberman, 1995). Exemplary teachers bring their personal learning activities and their individual likes and interests into their classrooms. Just as this study highlights, the teachers interviewed brought their learning projects into their classrooms by matching

state standards, designing lessons, and creating curriculum which allowed their students to see their own excitement for learning and share in learning as well. It is not unusual for these teachers to use these personal learning projects to garner enthusiasm and generate connections to their students. These teachers illustrate Grow's (1991) fourth stage: Learner's of High Self-Direction, having confidence of what they needed to learn and possessing the skills to get it done. However, we still do not know if these teachers enabled self-direction in their own students.

Haberman (1995) reported that in creating interviews for locating STAR teachers for urban schools, one of the characteristics of these teachers were that they were:

> Typically involved in some life activity that provides them with a sense of well-being and from which they continually learn. It might be philately, Russian opera, a Save the Wolves Club, composing music with computers, travel or some other avocation from which they derive meaning as well as pleasure. Inevitably, they bring these activities and interests into their classrooms and use them as ways of involving their students in learning. It is quite common to find teacher's special interests used as foci that generate great enthusiasm for learning among the students. The grandiose explanation for this phenomenon is that people who continually experience learning themselves have the prerequisites to generate the desire to learn in others.

These elementary teachers engaged in self-directed learning exhibited this desire to learn and elicited that desire in their students, which is recognized in research to result

in greater student achievement. They brought sewing, music, photography, technology, and their love of reading into the classroom and modeled what learners do for their students.

*Autonomy and Agency Lead to Effective Book Clubs*

The teachers interviewed listed reading as a way to initiate their learning projects. Reading and reading information on the internet were mentioned by all the teachers as initial pathways for their self-directed learning. Teachers formed partnerships and book clubs in order to have collegial support and a network of their peers. Descriptions of the Teachers as Readers program (Carmichael, 2001; Ruurs, 2006) revealed a highly-defined program with specific steps teachers must follow regarding the number of group members, the types of books to offer, and times to meet. Such highly defined groups can have a tendency to retreat into "contrived collegiality" when what is desired is true collegiality. The ad hoc groups formed by the teachers in this study had no set number of members, no set meeting format, and no reports to fill out. What they did have were teachers who had vested interests and autonomy to choose to join the group. Teacher as Readers holds great promise if it is authentic and avoids issues of contrived collegiality.

The teachers in this study who pursued reading for creative and professional learning projects were able to model what good readers do in their classrooms and also model lifelong reading with purpose for their students. Dobler (2009) in a case study of one teacher's evolution to becoming a more proficient reader posited that a teacher who develops better understanding of their own personal comprehension strategies through

professional reading and reflection may also lead to more effective reading instruction. Teachers who teach reading and writing must also be practitioners (Brooks, 2007). Teachers who are self-directed in their learning are readers, reading for pleasure and for information.

*Implications*

The teachers in this study were passionate about their self-directed learning, and brought that enthusiasm into the classrooms with them. This is in sharp contrast to attitudes about professional development which is typically one-stop whistle shop - those mini-workshops which exist outside a teacher's content area, grade level, or even classroom management style which seem to serve as a means for fulfilling the minimal hours needed for professional development. Teachers will attend these meetings, follow along, and return to their classrooms and do their own investigations. This study leads to several implications for practice and for further research.

*Implications for practice*

SDLRS/LPA as a screening tool. We know that teachers who project their enthusiasm for learning and their learning projects into the classroom are desired teacher prospects (Allington & Johnston, 2001; Haberman, 1995; McCall, 2006). Therefore, the Self-Directed Learning Readiness Survey/Learning Preference Assessment or an adapted version of it could possibly be used as an interview tool in hiring prospective teachers along with other interview guides. While self-directed learning is not, by itself, an

indicator of effective teaching, the SDLRS/LPA could be useful to administrators in identifying teachers whose professional development path might be a non-traditional one. Principals could then be prepared to support, rather than to quash, these individuals.

Nurturing teachers with high self-directed learning readiness. Teachers possessing high or above average readiness for self-directed learning and who pursue self-directed learning personally and professionally should be mentors for other teachers in their building. These teachers are already forming their ad hoc learning committees. Rather than stifling this innovation within their schools, administrators should embrace and encourage this type of learning. Micromanaging the autonomy out of these teachers would be a risk here, as this learning is teacher-initiated. Administrators need to cultivate this type of professional development and not crush it, realizing that not all teachers are self-directed learners, but can perhaps join up with those teachers that are in these ad hoc professional learning communities. Administration should also allow and give professional development credits for those teachers who undertake self-directed learning projects with care that over documentation does not stifle these teachers' initiatives.

Take advantage of the internet. All these teachers readily utilized the internet for self-directed learning. Colleges of teacher education should consider targeting and cultivating those teachers who have this self-directed learning readiness. Ways they can do this are by offering more internet courses and opening this portal to students early in their careers so that this aspect of the self-directed learning process is well-rehearsed by the time they have a classroom placement. Inquiry-based projects should be encouraged where self-directed learning readiness traits can be maximized in pursuing professional

and research interests. Teacher colleges should consider developing online teacher resources for preservice teachers and their graduates. Rather than maintaining websites with general program information, colleges of education can sponsor a teacher education site for collecting lesson plans, book reviews, forums for sharing information and finding mentors, and focused online learning groups.

*Implications for Further Research*

There is much room for future research into the self-directed learning readiness of teachers. This study only examined 100 teachers and cannot be generalized to the entire population of teachers. Other populations of teachers should be examined, including those in middle school and high school, and in other geographic areas. Also, research which examines the other end of the SDLRS/LPA scores - those teachers who scored low on the SDLRS/LPA - should prove intriguing.

Finally, self-directed readiness research has developed out of adult education and psychology. Adult education and teacher education programs should collaborate on research as teachers are adults and professional development is adult learning. These realms of research have so much to contribute and collaboration on future research would seem a natural fit.

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Appendices

Appendix A

*System Supervisor Letter*

Dear Supervisor,

Your system is invited to participate in a dissertation research project which examines self-directed learning practices of elementary school teachers. This study will entail two parts.

First, elementary teachers will complete an online survey related to their educational and learning pursuits outside of the classroom and in addition to planned professional development. The survey should take approximately 25 minutes to complete.

Secondly, ten teachers who rank as scoring "high" in self-directed learning readiness will be selected for personal interviews. Potentially, teachers from your system may be asked for an interview should they rank "high" on the survey.

The interviews will last approximately one hour. The researcher will use the information gathered from the interview to identify themes among teachers who are self-directed learners. The resulting data will be written as the researcher's PhD dissertation.

The results of this study may be helpful in planning future teacher learning projects in the future.

Sincerely,
Susan R. Wagner

Please sign and date verifying your approval:

Name: _____ Date: _____

School System: _____

Appendix B

*Informed Consent Statement*

**After the Final Bell:**
**The Self-Directed Learning Practices of Elementary Teachers**

You are invited to participate in a research study investigating self-directed learning practices of elementary teachers. The researcher for this project is a graduate student from The University of Tennessee and an elementary classroom teacher.

This study is divided into two phases. The first phase includes completion of the online SDLRS/LPA/Learning Readiness Scale. From among these participants, ten individuals will be asked to participate in an interview about their self-directed learning experiences. Before and throughout this research process, you may ask questions about the study. The researcher is willing to share her research findings with you after the completion of the project.

The interview will be digitally recorded for later transcription by the researcher. All digital files and transcription notes will be stored in a locked filing cabinet in the Bailey Education Complex at The University of Tennessee at Knoxville.

**Confidentiality**

All information you provide for the study will remain confidential. This includes all identifying and demographic information. Data pertaining to this study will be securely stored in a locked file cabinet at the Bailey Education Complex at The University of Tennessee at Knoxville and will be available only to the principal researcher conducting this study.

The results of the research along with descriptive statistics and participant quotations will be published at a future date. Your name will not be included within the research dissertation and your identity will be keep confidential and known only to the researcher. To preserve anonymity, pseudonyms will replace actual names of participants in the use of direct quotes from interviews.

Data from the study may be used by other researchers in the form of secondary data after the study is completed. No references to this data in printed reports or publications could link or identify participants in this study.

_____ Please initialize to indicate you have read and understand this page.

**Risks/Benefits**

There are no known risks or negative effects to the participant as a result of participation in this study.

Benefits to participation are additional insights into self-directed learning readiness and participation in a qualitative study which seeks insights into teacher learning practices. Your participation will contribute to the literature on teacher education

**Contact Information**

If you have any questions about the study or the research procedures, please contact Susan R. Wagner at the Department of Theory and Practice in Teacher Education, Baily Education Complex, The University of Tennessee at Knoxville. You will be able to reach her at [email address]. If you have questions regarding your participation in this study, contact the University of Tennessee Research Compliance Services of the Office of Research (865-974-3466).

**Participation**

Your participation is the study is voluntary and you may redraw at anytime from the study. Should you decide to do so, your data will be destroyed.

**Consent**

I have read the above information and have received a copy of this form. I agree to participate in this study.

Participant's signature:_____ Date:_____

Researcher's signature:_____ Date:_____

Appendix C

*Online Instrument*

Dear Elementary Teacher,

You are invited to participate in a research study investigating elementary teachers and learning. The researcher for this project is a graduate student from The University of Tennessee and an elementary classroom teacher. This study is divided into two phases. The first phase includes completion of the online Learning Preference Assessment.

All information you provide for the study will remain confidential. This includes all demographic information as well as identifying information for those who choose to give it at the end. Data pertaining to this study will be available only to the principal researcher conducting this study and her advisor and Guglielmino and Associates, the firm processing the data.

The results of the research along with descriptive statistics and participant quotations will be published at a future date.

Anonymous data from the study may be used by other researchers in the form of secondary data after the study is completed. No references to this data in printed reports or publications could link or identify participants in this study.

Your completion of the online survey serves as your agreement to participate in the study.

Susan R. Wagner
The University of Tennessee

- ○ Yes, I agree to participate. Continue to the survey
- ○ No, I am opting out of the survey

Next

The next questionnaire is designed to gather data on learning preferences and attitude towards learning. After reading each item, please indicate the degree to which you feel that statement is true of you. Please read each choice carefully and select the number of the responses which best expresses your feeling.

There is no time limit for the questionnaire. Try not to spend too much time on any one time on any one item, however. Your first reaction to the question will usually be the most accurate.

Previous Next

Please read each choice carefully and select the number of the responses which best expresses your feeling.

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| | Almost never true of me; I hardly ever feel this way | Not often true of me; I feel this way less than half the time | Sometimes true of me; I feel this way less than half the time. | Sometimes true of me; I feel this way about half the time. | Almost always true of me; there are very few times when I don't feel this way | No Answer |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. I'm looking forward to learning as long as I'm living. | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |
| 2. I know what I want to learn. | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |
| 3. When I see something that I don't understand, I stay away from it. | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |
| 4. If there is something I want to learn, I can figure out a way to learn it. | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |
| 5. I love to learn. | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |

| | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 6. It takes me a while to get started on new projects. | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |
| 7. In a classroom, I expect the teacher to tell all class members exactly what to do at all times. | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |
| 8. I believe that thinking about who you are, where you are, and where you are going should be a major part of every person's education. | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |
| 9. I don't work very well on my own. | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |

Previous Next

Please read each choice carefully and select the number of the responses which best expresses your feeling.

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| | Almost never true of me; I hardly ever feel this way | Not often true of me; I feel this way less than half the time | Sometimes true of me; I feel this way less than half the time. | Sometimes true of me; I feel this way about half the time. | Almost always true of me; there are very few times when I don't feel this way | No Answer |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 10. If I discover a need for information that I don't have, I know where to go to get it. | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |
| 11. I can learn things on my own better than most people. | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |
| 12. Even if I have a great idea, I can't seem to develop a plan for making it work. | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |
| 13. In a learning experience, I prefer to take part in deciding what will be learned and how. | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |
| 14. Difficult study doesn't bother me if I'm interested in something. | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |
| 15. No one but me is truly responsible for what I learn. | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |
| 16. I can tell whether I'm learning something well or not. | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |
| 17. There are so many things I want to learn that I wish that there were more hours in a day. | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |

| | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 18. If there is something I have decided to learn, I can find time for it, no matter how busy I am. | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |

Previous Next

Please read each choice carefully and select the number of the responses which best expresses your feeling.

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| | Almost never true of me; I hardly ever feel this way | Not often true of me; I feel this way less than half the time | Sometimes true of me; I feel this way less than half the time. | Sometimes true of me; I feel this way about half the time. | Almost always true of me; there are very few times when I don't feel this way | No Answer |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 19. Understanding what I read is a problem for me. | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |
| 20. If I don't learn, it's not my fault. | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |
| 21. I know when I need to learn more about something. | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |
| 22. If I can understand something well enough to get a good grade on a test, it doesn't bother me if I still have questions about it. | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |
| 23. I think libraries are boring places. | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |
| 24. The people I admire most are always learning new things. | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |
| 25. I can think of many different ways to learn about a new topic. | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |

| | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 26. I try to relate what I am learning to my long-term goals. | | | | | | |
| 27. I am capable of learning for myself almost anything I might need to know. | | | | | | |

Previous Next

Please read each choice carefully and select the number of the responses which best expresses your feeling.

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| | Almost never true of me; I hardly ever feel this way | Not often true of me; I feel this way less than half the time | Sometimes true of me; I feel this way less than half the time. | Sometimes true of me; I feel this way about half the time. | Almost always true of me; there are very few times when I don't feel this way | No Answer |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 28. I really enjoy tracking down the answer to a question. | | | | | | |
| 29. I don't like dealing with questions where there is not one right answer. | | | | | | |
| 30. I have a lot of curiosity about things. | | | | | | |
| 31. I'll be glad when I'm finished learning. | | | | | | |
| 32. I'm not as interested in learning as some other people seem to be. | | | | | | |
| 33. I don't have any problem with basic study skills. | | | | | | |

| | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 34. I like to try new things, even if I'm not sure how they will turn out. | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |
| 35. I don't like it when people who really know what they're doing point out mistakes that I am making. | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |
| 36. I'm good at thinking of unusual ways to do things. | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |

Previous Next

Please read each choice carefully and select the number of the responses which best expresses your feeling.

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| | Almost never true of me; I hardly ever feel this way | Not often true of me; I feel this way less than half the time | Sometimes true of me; I feel this way less than half the time. | Sometimes true of me; I feel this way about half the time. | Almost always true of me; there are very few times when I don't feel this way | No Answer |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 37. I like to think about the future. | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |
| 38. I'm better than most people are at trying to find out the things I need to know. | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |
| 39. I think of problems as challenges, not stop signs. | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |
| 40. I can make myself do what I think I should. | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |
| 41. I'm happy with the way I investigate problems. | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |

| | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 42. I become a leader in group learning situations. | | | | | | |
| 43. I enjoy discussing ideas. | | | | | | |
| 44. I don't like challenging learning situations. | | | | | | |
| 45. I have a strong desire to learn new things. | | | | | | |

Previous Next

Please read each choice carefully and select the number of the responses which best expresses your feeling.

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| | Almost never true of me; I hardly ever feel this way | Not often true of me; I feel this way less than half the time | Sometimes true of me; I feel this way less than half the time. | Sometimes true of me; I feel this way about half the time. | Almost always true of me; there are very few times when I don't feel this way | No Answer |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 46. The more I learn, the more exciting the world becomes. | | | | | | |
| 47. Learning is fun. | | | | | | |
| 48. It's better to stick with the learning methods that we know will work instead of always trying new ones. | | | | | | |
| 49. I want to learn more so that I can keep growing as a person. | | | | | | |

| | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 50. I am responsible for my learning - no one else is. | | | | | | |
| 51. Learning how to learn is important to me. | | | | | | |
| 52. I will never be too old to learn new things. | | | | | | |
| 53. Constant learning is a bore. | | | | | | |
| 54. Learning is a tool for life. | | | | | | |

Previous Next

Please read each choice carefully and select the number of the responses which best expresses your feeling.

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| | Almost never true of me; I hardly ever feel this way | Not often true of me; I feel this way less than half the time | Sometimes true of me; I feel this way less than half the time. | Sometimes true of me; I feel this way about half the time. | Almost always true of me; there are very few times when I don't feel this way | No Answer |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 55. I learn several new things on my own each year. | | | | | | |
| 56. Learning doesn't make any difference in my life. | | | | | | |
| 57. I am an effective learner in the classroom and on my own. | | | | | | |
| 58. Learners are leaders. | | | | | | |

Previous Next

Please indicate your age:

Previous Next

Please indicate your race:

- African American
- Asian/Pacific Islander
- Caucasian
- Hispanic
- Native American
- Biracial
- Other

Previous Next

Please indicate your years in teaching:

Previous Next

Please indicate what grade level you teach:

- ☐ Kindergarten
- ☐ First
- ☐ Second
- ☐ Third
- ☐ Fourth
- ☐ Fifth
- ☐ Specialist: _____
- ☐ Other: _____

Previous Next

In what type of school do you teach?

- ☐ Public
- ☐ Public-Title 1
- ☐ Private
- ☐ Parochial
- ☐ Charter
- ☐ Other _____

Previous Next

What is your educational background?

- Bachelors
- Bachelors + graduate
- Masters
- Masters + graduate
- Education Specialist
- Doctorate

Previous Next

Snce this instrument has not been widely used with elementary teachers, I would like to interview some of you who completed the survey, to see how its results relate to what you tell me about yourself as a learner and a teacher.

Would you be willing to let me contact you, and for me to know your results on the survey?

- I give Susan Wagner permission to contact me with more information about a follow up interview.
- I do not wish to be contacted for follow-up.

Previous Next

Please enter in your name and email address.

Name:

Email address:

Previous Next

You have completed the survey. Thank you for your participation in this project.

Appendix D

*Interview Guide for Study*

1. Tell me about your educational background.
2. How many years have you been teaching and in what grades?
3. What subjects do you teach?
4. Describe the school where you teach.
5. How do you define "learning"?
6. On the online survey, you rated as a "highly self-directed learner." How do you see your learning as self-directed?
7. Can you give examples of times where your learning was self-directed?
8. In what ways do you learn best?
9. How would you compare your learning style with others?
10. How do feel your students learn best?
11. What sorts of activities do you pursue outside of your classroom?
12. What sorts of barriers or obstacles, if any, have you encountered in pursuing activities or learning outside the classroom?
13. What sorts of aids or supports, if any, have you encountered in pursing activities or learning outside the classroom?
14. Which activities that you have pursued outside the classroom, do you find yourself using or discussing with your students or fellow teachers?
15. Do your students see you as a learner?
    If so, how do you communicate or share your own learning with your students?
16. Do you feel that knowledge you have gained outside the classroom impacts your teaching within your classroom? If yes, can you describe specific examples?
17. Would you choose to pursue an activity outside the classroom on your own, with the goal to aid your classroom teaching?
18. How do you go about learning a new teaching methodology or curriculum program?
19. What types of additional training or professional development have you had?
20. Which of these is most memorable to you and why?
21. It is often said that teachers are the hardest students to teach. How do you feel about this statement?

    Thank you for your time and participation in this study.

# VITA

**Susan Wagner** is an elementary educator with Blount County Schools in Tennessee. She received her Master's degree in Instructional Technology and Curriculum from the University of Tennessee and her undergraduate degree from Maryville College in Child Development and Learning with teacher licensure. While a student at Maryville College, she received the college's Child Development Award. Her elementary teaching experience includes multiage instruction and curriculum design. Susan has provided professional development in creative writing instruction. Her research interests include motivating struggling readers, creative writing, technology in reading instruction, and teacher education. Susan is a member of the International Reading Association and a 2008 recipient of Outstanding Teacher of the Year from Tennessee Humanities.